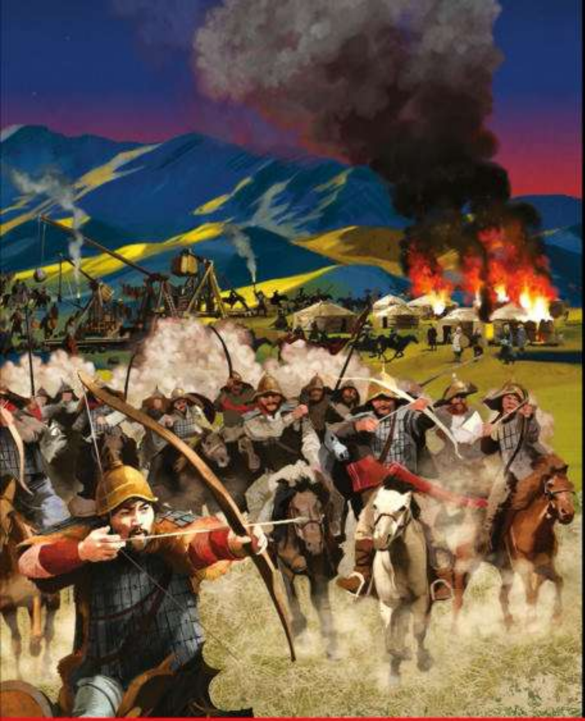

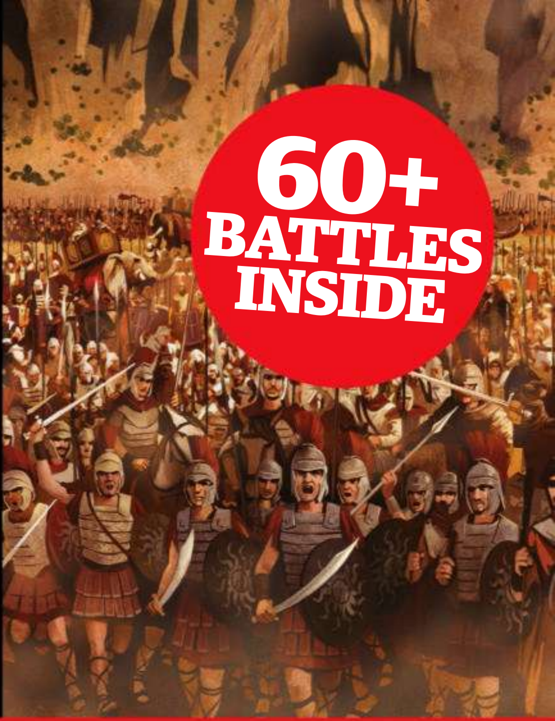

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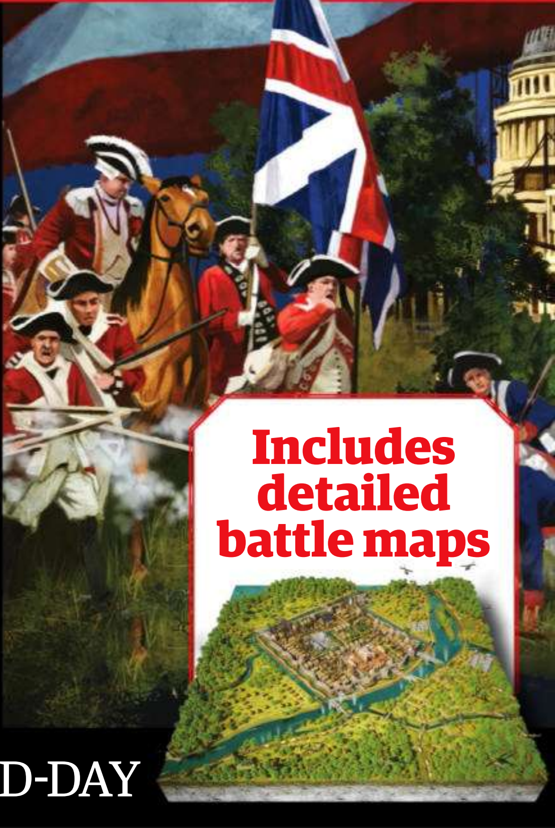

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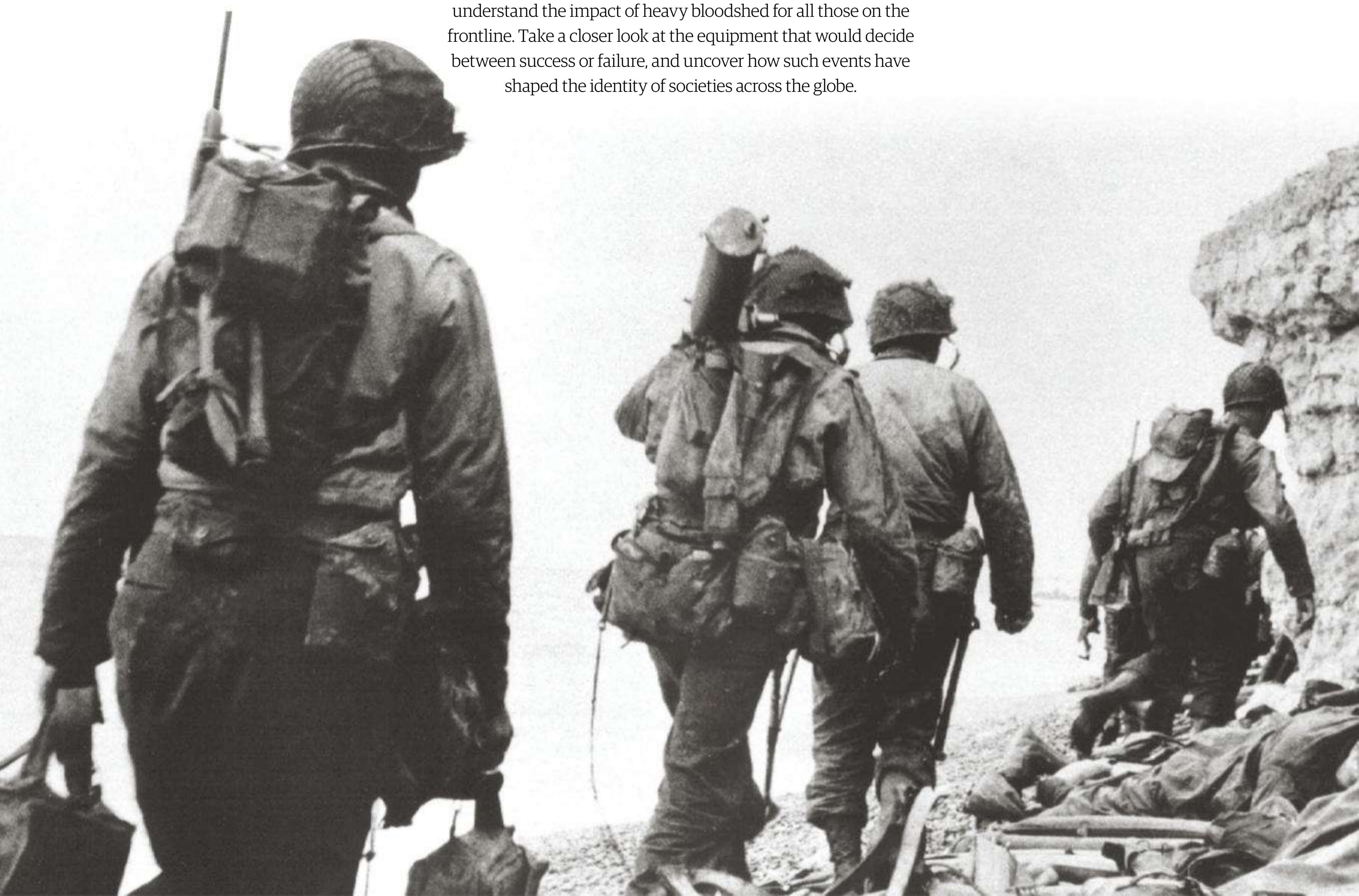

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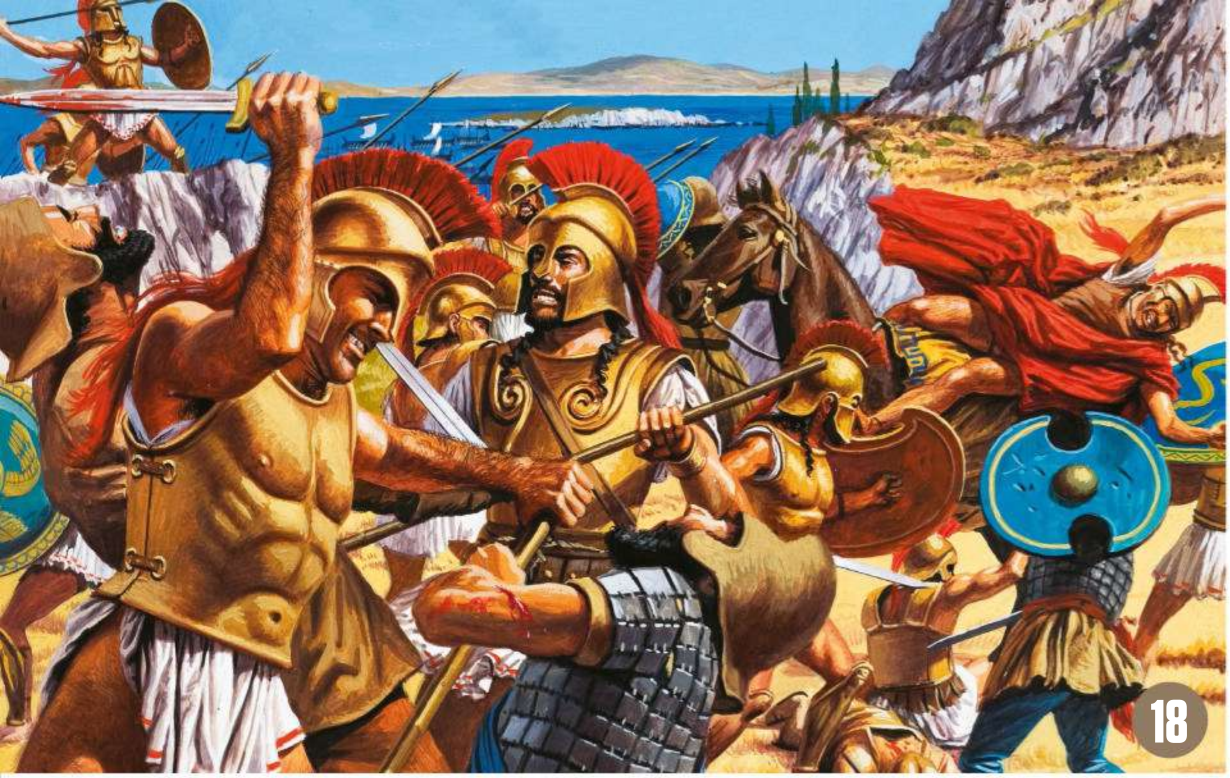

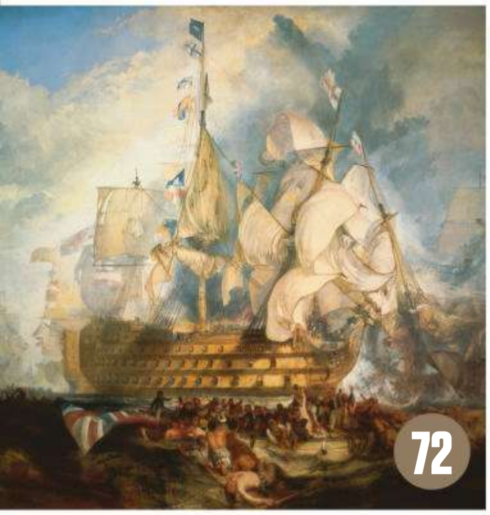

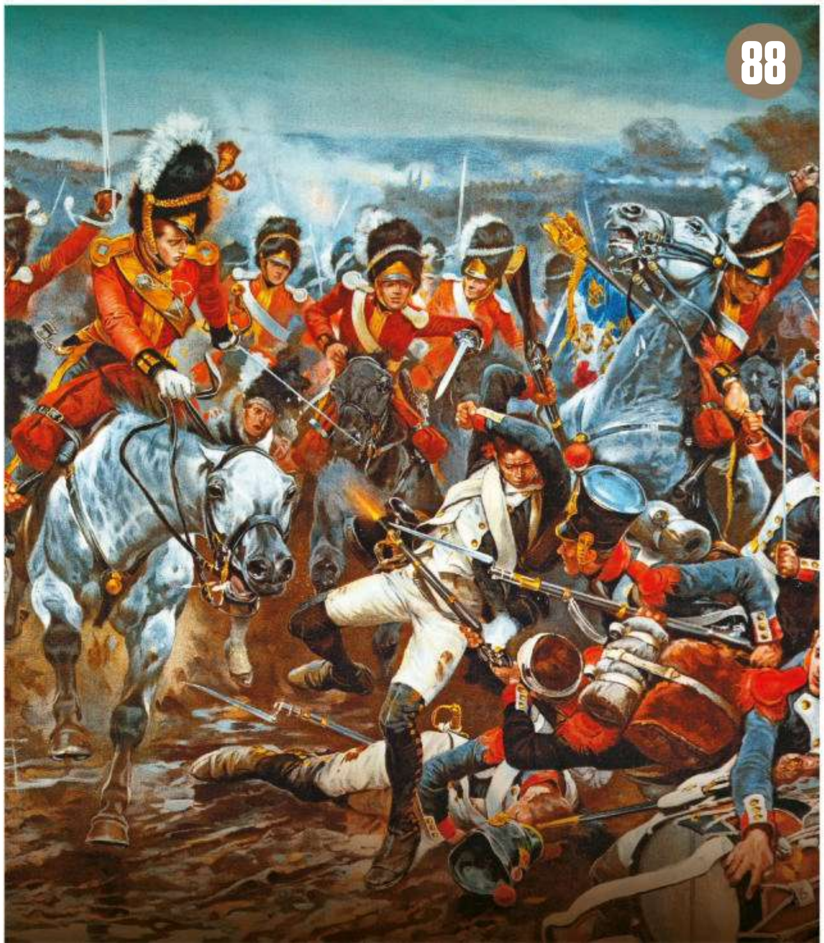

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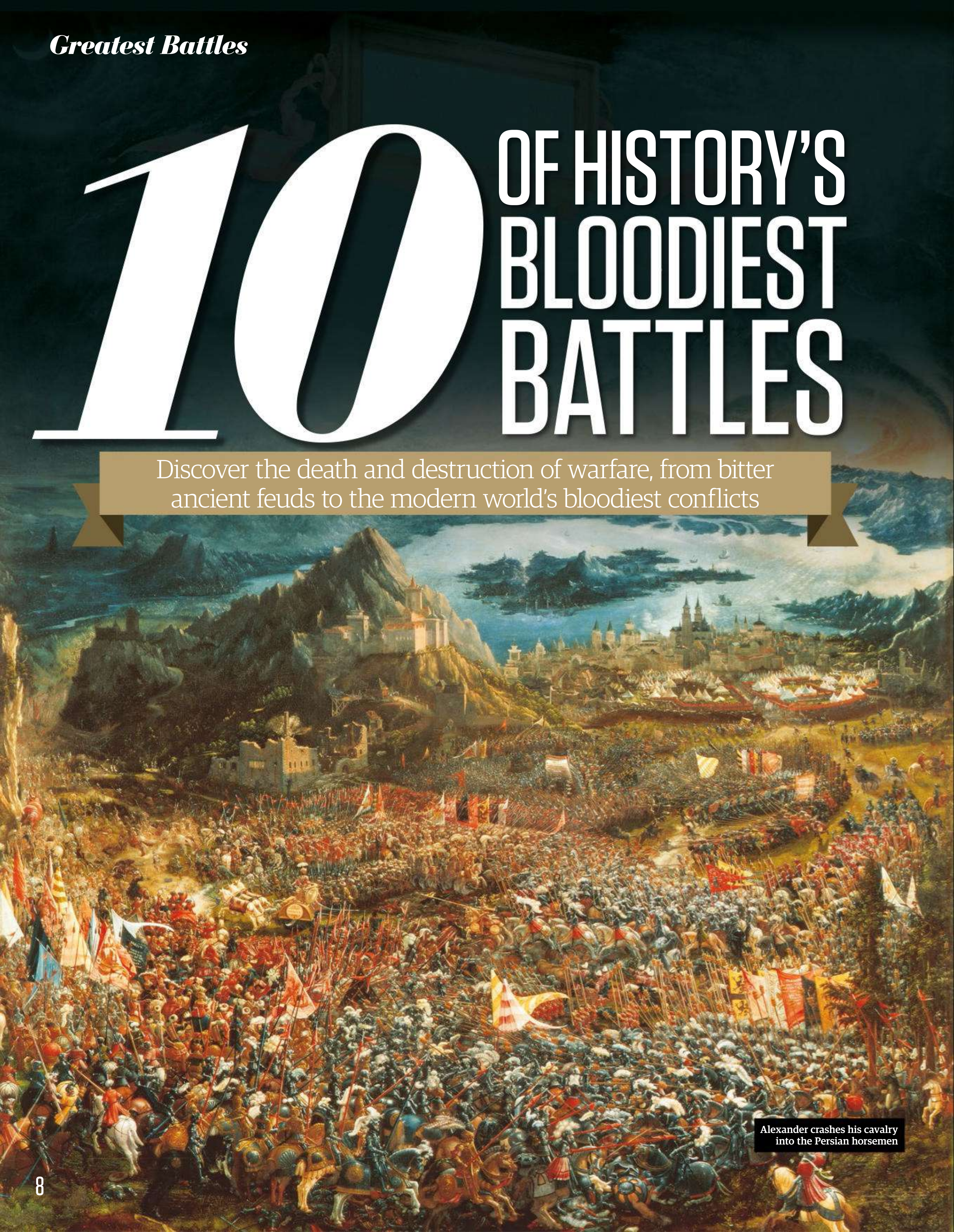
10 OF HISTORY'S BLOODIEST BATTLES

Discover the death and destruction of warfare, from bitter ancient feuds to the modern world's bloodiest conflicts



Alexander crashes his cavalry into the Persian horsemen

Be it for feuds, gold, honour or to set men free, warfare has survived as the single most enduring human endeavour in history. While intellectual advancement has cured disease, built vast metropolises and created a truly globalised world, the pursuit of war has not diminished nor has its lethality to the men and women compelled to fight them. Relentless warfare fought by opposing states has created an ever more urgent drive to harness doctrine and technology to create dominance on the battlefield; be it Rome's heavy infantry cutting through barbarian hordes, the mounted knight running down hapless medieval infantry, siege engines levelling Renaissance cities or highly disciplined musket-armed infantry wiping out Napoleonic armies.

In the modern age, the ability to utilise sophisticated technology to simultaneously conquer the land, sea and sky has given militaries unparalleled dominance on the battlefield. Of course, technology and doctrine alone does not win conflicts, as the Swiss military writer Antoine-Henri Jomini wrote: "The superiority of armament may increase the chances of success in war, but it does not of itself win battles." The increasing use of technology has created the need for better trained, better motivated troops, the hapless conscript fighting for his lord has been replaced with the fit seasoned professional willing and able to fight and keep fighting until the end.

Warfare has also captured the imagination of learned individuals who have studied the 'art' of waging war, developing endless volumes of text on how to inflict the maximum amount of destruction on the enemy while limiting friendly losses to an acceptable minimum. These men, be they philosophers, poets, politicians and psychopaths, have all been driven either by the promise and adventure of glorious warfare or by a patriotic need to defend their homeland. The words of Sun Tzu, Machiavelli, Clausewitz, Liddel Hart and many others have taught and inspired generals to victory and they have also acted as a benchmark on how war should be practised, even to this day. Throughout all of these developments have been the war leaders themselves, the men who have commanded the battlefield and led men to eternal glory or disgraceful defeat using the finest weaponry their nations can muster. Despite the progress of industry and technology in creating ever more sophisticated weapons there has never been an advancement that has stopped one simple truth; that in war humans kill and are killed.

Here, ten of history's bloodiest battles are presented to show this undeniable truth. Each section has a summary at the bottom in which casualties are the closest approximations available and include those that have been killed as well as wounded. Some of the battles featured have been fought for greed, ambition or the desire for conquest. All of them have been remembered for the destruction and devastating loss of life that they caused.

BATTLE OF ISSUS

333 BCE

Alexander the Great's stunning victories throughout the 3rd century BCE united an empire that stretched from the deserts of Egypt to the frontiers of India. Originating from Macedonia in northern Greece, Alexander's ambition to build his father's empire into a world-leading power plunged the whole of the eastern Mediterranean and Persia into unrelenting warfare. The Battle of Issus started his great campaign in the east, defeating the Persians in the open field and opening up the endless landmass of Persia for Alexander and his vast army. It was a battle noted for its savagery; Alexander was an uncompromising war leader who would accept nothing less than total victory when his armies were in the field.

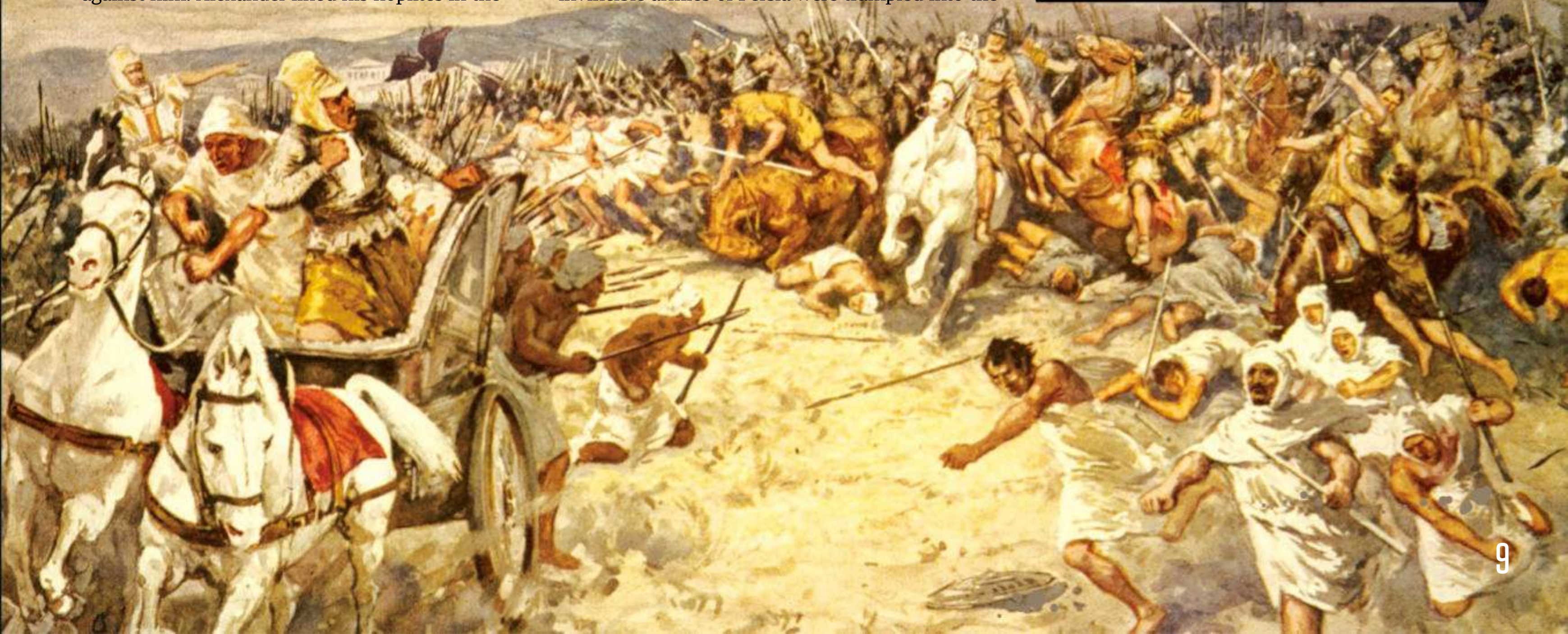
His victory stemmed from his use of terrain, his well-trained and equipped hoplites and the poorly disciplined Persian hordes that were assembled against him. Alexander lined his hoplites in the centre, facing the enemy across a river while positioning his cavalry on his two flanks. Darius, the Persian leader, assumed that Alexander's flanks were his weakest point and launched a full-scale cavalry assault on the left wing. Alexander ordered his cavalry positioned on his left to hold their ground while his hoplites and the Persian infantry slogged it out in the centre. Both the hoplites and the cavalry managed to hold the Persians back, creating a dangerous stalemate.

Alexander then saw that his best chance for victory was a cavalry charge on the Persian right and crashed his cavalry into the Persian cavalry on his side, breaking their line and forcing Darius to break and run. Rather than pursue, Alexander wheeled his cavalry round and charged again into the backs of the Persian infantry. Spears and shields broke under Alexander's onslaught and the invincible armies of Persia were trampled into the dirt by the weight of his cavalry and the shields of his hoplites. With the central position lost, Darius sounded a retreat and was cut down, spreading panic through the Persian ranks. As the Persians fled, Alexander rallied his cavalry one last time and pursued the Persians until dusk, butchering them as they fled.

COMBATANTS
Macedon **Vs** the Achaemenid Empire

CASUALTIES
Macedon: 7000
Achaemenid Empire: 20,000

LEGACY
Alexander marched into Persia and brought about the collapse of the Persian empire. He also married into the Persian royal family, cementing his hold in the Middle East.



BATTLE OF MALPLAQUET

11 SEPTEMBER 1709

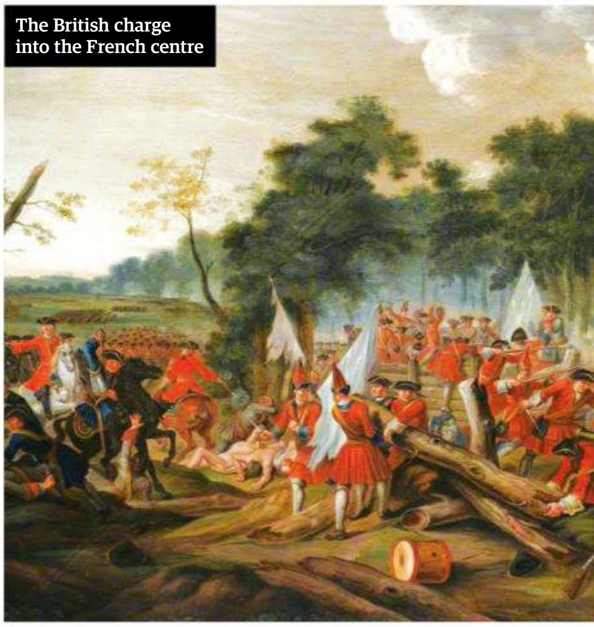
The Battle of Malplaquet was fought to the thunderous sound of cannon and the crescendo of musket fire. An alliance of countries, which included Great Britain, Prussia, Austria and the United Provinces (the Dutch Republic), went to war to secure Europe from encroaching French control of Spain and her vast overseas empire. The battle that formed part of the War of Spanish Succession represented one of the bloodiest clashes of the whole campaign. It was also the most lethal engagement fought that century. The body count of the alliance forces and French forces numbered into the tens of thousands as gunpowder, cannon fire and heavy horse turned Malplaquet field into a bloody slaughterhouse.

The French allowed the alliance forces to come on to them, giving them the advantage of defence, cutting down the Austrian and Dutch troops that were trying to flank them. In the end, the French positions on the flanks were overwhelmed but not after thousands of alliance men lay dead through the intense barrage of firepower that confronted them. The British then smashed the French centre affecting a rout, allowing British cavalry to storm in and mop up the survivors. Despite the alliance carrying the day the casualties sustained by their troops meant that they could not go after the fleeing French forces; there simply weren't enough men to action a proper pursuit. This allowed the French to live to fight another day.

COMBATANTS
Great Britain, Austria, United Provinces, Prussia **Vs** France and Bavaria

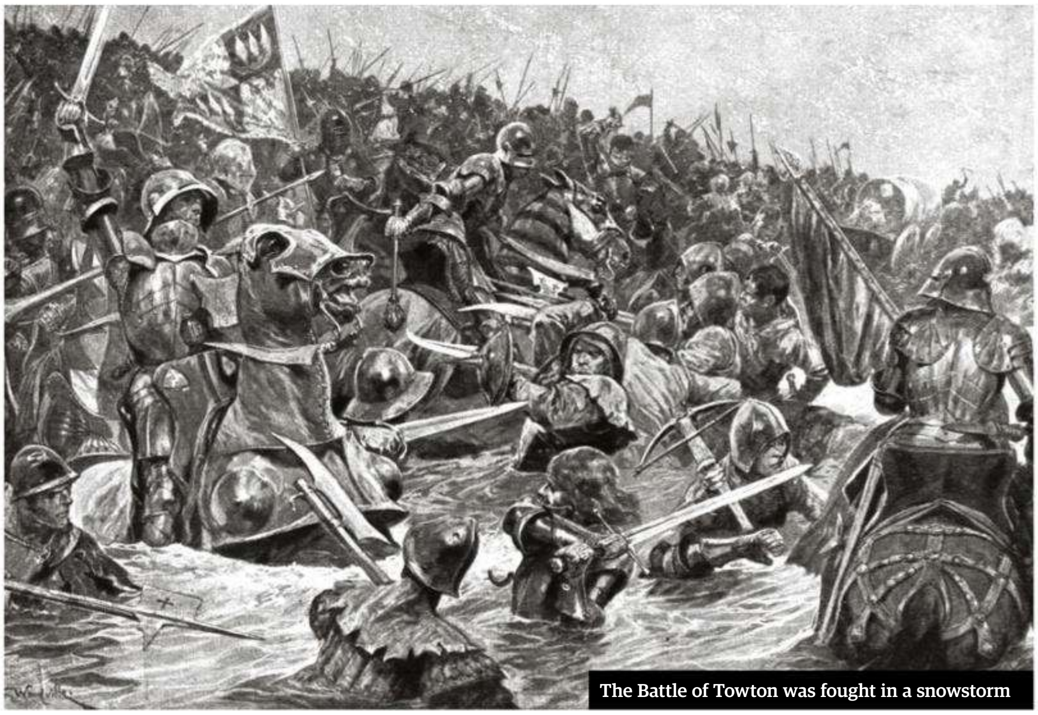
CASUALTIES
The alliance: 21,000
France and Bavaria: 11,000

LEGACY
Malplaquet saw the use of musket on a large scale, convincing commanders it was easier to hold positions than it was to attack.


The British charge into the French centre

BATTLE OF TOWTON

29 MARCH 1461


The Battle of Towton was fought in a snowstorm

Known as the bloodiest battle ever fought on English soil, this was one of the climactic engagements of the War of the Roses. Fought in the freezing fields of Yorkshire it pitted the House of York, who had captured the king and forced him to accept their dominance over the throne, against the House of Lancaster.

The Yorkists were outnumbered but their leader, Lord Fauconberg, ordered them to take advantage of the strong winds blowing towards the Lancastrians and use arrows to thin out their numbers. This had a devastating effect on Lancastrian morale, since their arrows could not reach the Yorkists because they were firing upwind.

The battle then descended into brutal hand-to-hand combat which lasted hours, staining the falling snow blood red. By its end, thirty thousand men lay dead on the cold Yorkshire field.

> "The battle then descended into brutal hand-to-hand combat which lasted hours, staining the falling snow blood red"

COMBATANTS
House of York **Vs** House of Lancaster

CASUALTIES
House of York: 10,000
House of Lancaster: 20,000

LEGACY
With the Lancastrians defeated, the Yorkist control of the throne was secured with Edward being made king in June 1461. He was the first Yorkist king of England.

SIEGE OF BAGHDAD

29 JANUARY - 10 FEBRUARY 1258

By 1258 the Mongol horde had swept from China through Persia and was threatening the Middle Eastern kingdoms of the Islamic caliphates. Behind them was a trail of destruction, slavery and horrifying stories of unbeatable mounted warriors on small warhorses laying waste to civilisation wherever they saw it. Bagdad sitting as a golden oasis in the middle of the Arabian desert was too much of a tempting target for the Mongol ruler Hulagu Khan to pass up. Assembling the largest Mongol horde ever committed to the field in one place, nearly one hundred and fifty thousand men, Hulagu raced to Baghdad and laid siege to it. The Mongols choked off the city's supplies and then began building siege engines to destroy the walls.

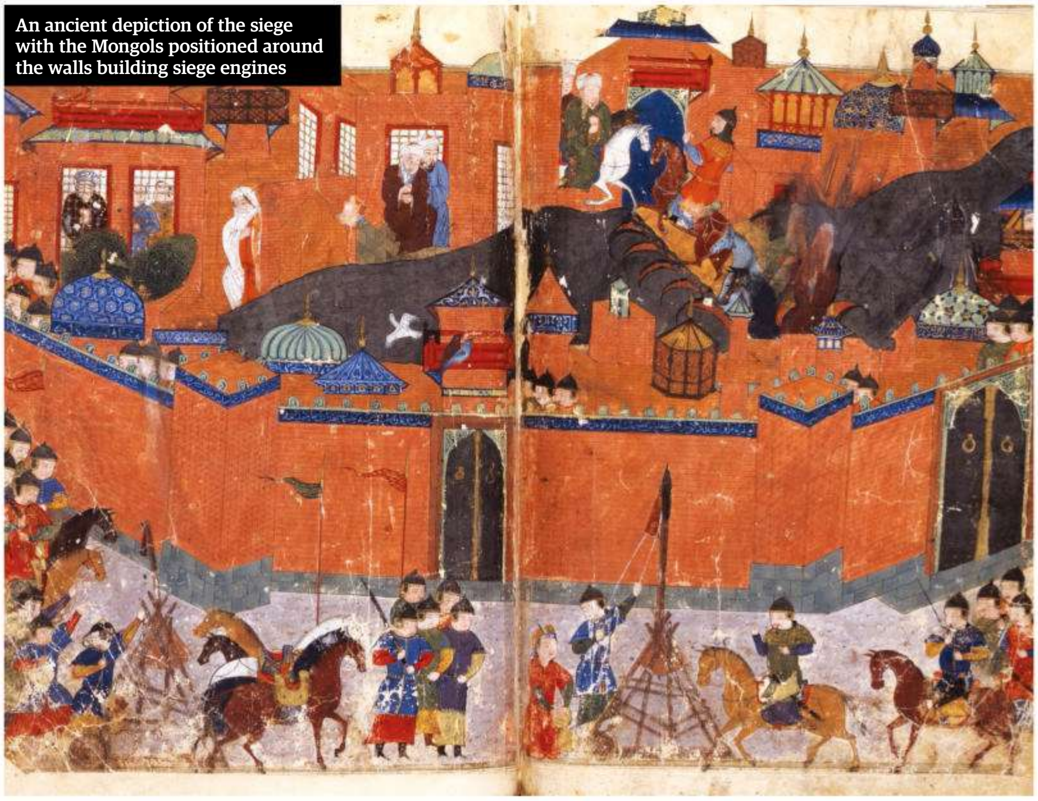
Baghdad's ruler, Al-Mustai'sim was convinced that the Arab world would not suffer the ignobility of his great Islamic capital falling to the barbarians, but he overestimated his standing in foreign affairs and was left to face the horde alone. As the situation became desperate, he sent out cavalry to confront the Mongols, underestimating how adaptable and resilient they were when confronting enemy cavalry. The Mongols had laid a trap, flooding a ditch and so trapping their enemy between the water and the horde and they butchered the defenders to a man before continuing the siege, destroying defensive walls and taking the outskirts of the city. While the defenders fought valiantly there simply wasn't enough of them to stop the horde's wave attacks.

Eventually, Al-Mustai'sim tried to offer terms to the Khan but his offers were refused, the city was sacked and its population was raped and murdered. The level of devastation the Mongols brought was horrifying; some estimates have put the number of civilians killed between two and eight hundred thousand. Thousands of civilians were run down and killed as they fled - there was no quarter from Hulagu's men. Before the Mongols, Baghdad was a centre of learning and culture, its grand library the envy of the Western world. Now the city lay in ruins, its streets choked with corpses and Al-Mustai'sim's people dead or enslaved. The Mongols marched away, leaving nothing but charred ruins.

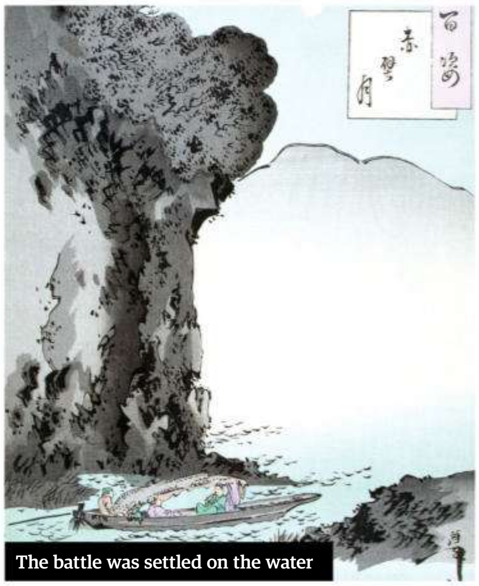
COMBATANTS
The Mongol Empire **Vs** Abbasid Caliphate

CASUALTIES
The Mongol Empire: minimal
Abbasid Caliphate: 50,000 soldiers and up to 800,000 civilians

LEGACY
The Mongols secured the whole Arabian desert after the siege but were eventually forced to retreat east after in-fighting.



An ancient depiction of the siege with the Mongols positioned around the walls building siege engines



The battle was settled on the water

BATTLE OF RED CLIFFS

201 CE

In this epic battle that went down in Chinese folk history as the story of few standing against many, two warring Chinese factions faced off against each other to decide the fate of a country. The allied forces of the southern warlords Liu Bei and Sun Quan stood against the numerically superior forces of northern plains warlord Cho Cho who wished to unite the empire under his tyrannical rule.

Bei and Quan knew they would have no chance against Cho Cho in a fair fight and that cunning was required. They initiated battle across the Yangtze river where Cho Cho's fledgling navy was vulnerable. After a small skirmish Bei and Quan pretended to surrender, sending capital ships down the river to negotiate terms. However, instead of a peace offering, Cho Cho's entire fleet was destroyed as the ships turned out to be skiffs loaded with flaming kindle. As thousands of his soldiers and sailors burned to death, Cho Cho was forced to retreat, handing victory to the southern warlords.

COMBATANTS
Liu Bei and Sun Quan's army combined **Vs** Cao Cao's army

CASUALTIES
No firm estimates but the battle involved nearly a million men with thousands of deaths on both sides

LEGACY
Red Cliff ensured that China would not become a single nation under one ruler.

BATTLE OF LEIPZIG

16-19 OCTOBER 1813

With over six hundred thousand troops involved, the Battle of Leipzig was the biggest engagement of manpower committed to a battle before World War I. It was fought for pride and empires, as Napoleon Bonaparte plunged Europe into total war to build his dynasty in the Germanic hinterland. Against him stood a collection of nations determined to resist his dictatorial will, including Prussia, Sweden, Russia and Austria in a grand coalition.

They met in the fields surrounding Leipzig for an epic showdown that killed over a hundred thousand men. Napoleon's plan was simple: destroy the huge army the Coalition had assembled piecemeal, as he had done in previous campaigns through the unity of his Grande Armée. On the first day this appeared to be working, two bloody engagements against Austrian and Prussian troops resulted in Napoleon commanding the small town of Leipzig and much of the surrounding countryside. However, Napoleon failed to follow up on these victories and allowed the two armies to regroup and receive reinforcements from the other armies of the Coalition nations. On 18 October the largest engagement ever fought in the 19th century took place.

Napoleon had retreated back to Leipzig and was determined to hold it at all costs, but the French troops were now trapped and being hammered by endless Coalition infantry assaults. The only way out was to fight to a bridge leading westward to the safety of France. Seeing his men being slaughtered through the sheer weight of the Coalition's numbers, Napoleon ordered a strategic retreat to the bridge which was now being threatened by the Coalition's advance. In the ensuing panic a frightened French corporal blew the bridge up after he thought the Coalition was going to take it, just as the French soldiers were retreating over it. The explosion flew hundreds of hapless soldiers into the air and stranded thousands more in Leipzig. In the ensuing chaos, Napoleon made it to the western bank to safety and stayed long enough to watch his army completely disintegrate around him. It was the first time in his career that another army had inflicted such a defeat on him in the field.

COMBATANTS

French Grande Armée **Vs** The Coalition army

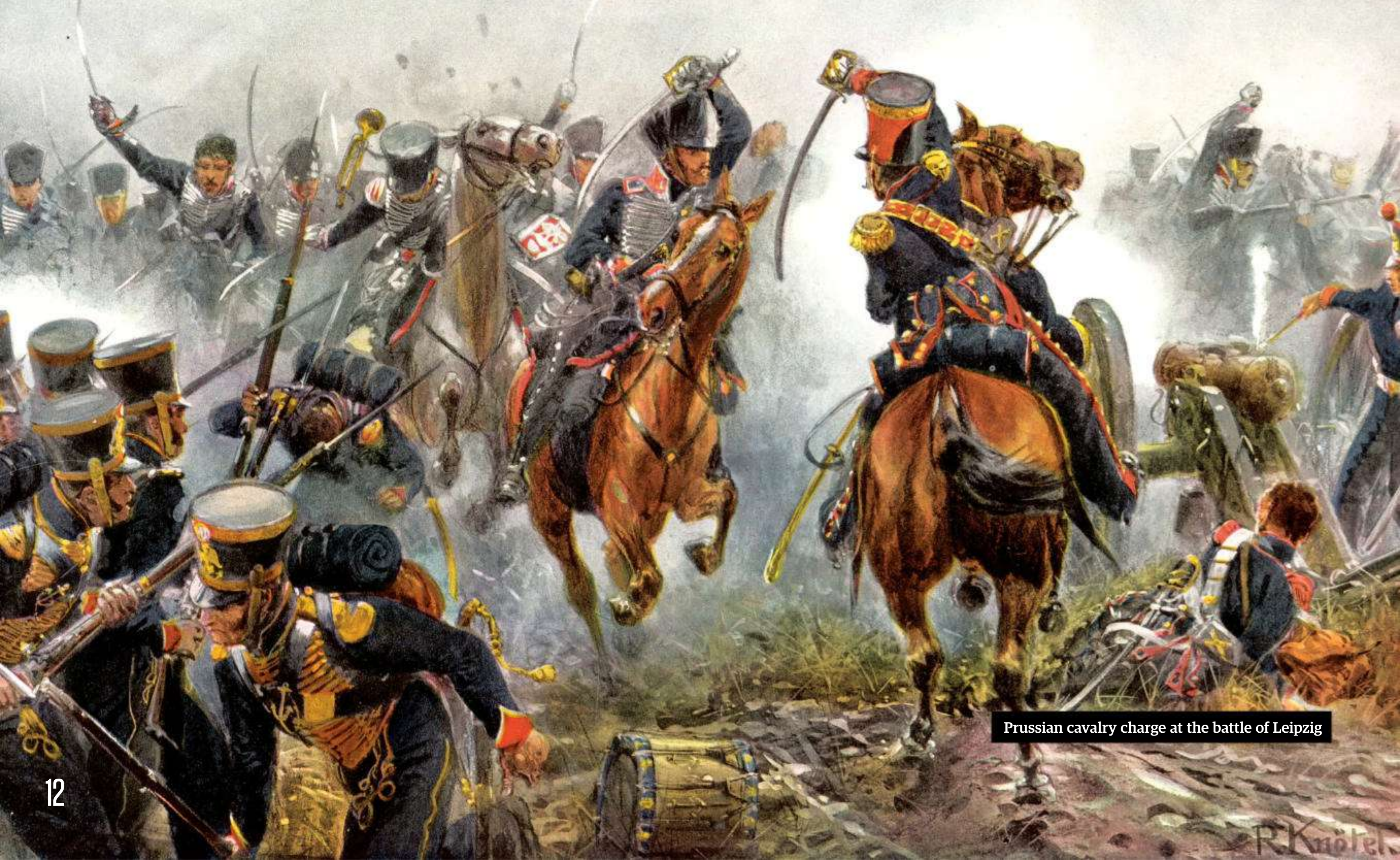
CASUALTIES

French Grande Armée: 60,000
The Coalition: 54,000

LEGACY

The Coalition was able to maintain the independence of the German region of the Rhine. Napoleon was forced back to France and eventually abdicated a year later.

> "Napoleon had retreated back to Leipzig and was determined to hold it at all costs, but the French troops were now trapped"



Prussian cavalry charge at the battle of Leipzig

BATTLE OF SALSU 612 CE

The Battle of Salsu holds the grisly reputation as being one of the most lethal open-field battles in military history. Fought by the Korean kingdom of Goguryeo against the invading armies of imperial China, the battle killed over three hundred thousand men within hours of commencing on the Korean northern plains. In 612 CE, Imperial China under the Sui dynasty was bent on expansion to secure its hold on domestic politics. It saw the small kingdoms of Korea as a perfect area for conquest, as the Koreans were traditionally seen as weaker in both military and political aspects by the Chinese.

Over a million Chinese soldiers marched into Korea to conquer its people and destroy the Goguryeo kingdom in the north of the country in one of the largest land invasions ever attempted by imperial China. The Koreans were not prepared to accept subjection to Chinese ambitions and fought an effective guerrilla war against the advance. The Chinese were constantly harassed by the retreating Koreans, who wore down their huge army, diminishing its moral and frustrating Chinese efforts to secure the Korean countryside. The Chinese eventually reached a shallow river north of Pyongyang where the Koreans had stopped running and stood to face their invaders.

Korean General Euji Mundeok knew he had no chance of winning a set piece battle against the invaders, so he harnessed the power of nature. The river the Chinese were crossing was dammed upstream, which meant the water was shallow, so Euji opened the dam just as the Chinese were in the middle of fording the river, creating a huge wave of water that rushed down the valley. The water moved so quickly that the Chinese had no chance to react - the whole area flooded, drowning the Chinese warriors in their bulky armour. What was left of the army struggled to recover itself before a huge Korean cavalry attack swept down on top of them, running down the hapless survivors. The Chinese had to retreat so quickly that many of the soldiers could not outrun the bloodthirsty Koreans, creating a trail of blood and death all the way back to the Chinese-Korean border at the Liadong Peninsula.

COMBATANTS
The Korean kingdom of Goguryeo **Vs** Imperial China

CASUALTIES
Korean Kingdom of Goguryeo: minimal
Imperial China: 300,300

LEGACY
The Sui dynasty fell in decline through loss of manpower and was eventually replaced by the Tang. Goguryeo was left in peace.

鉄良張勳把手南京
黎師深謀
遠震周空
城誘敵大
功收旗軍
長江徐老
張
將台
城路外

Chinese soldiers in battle

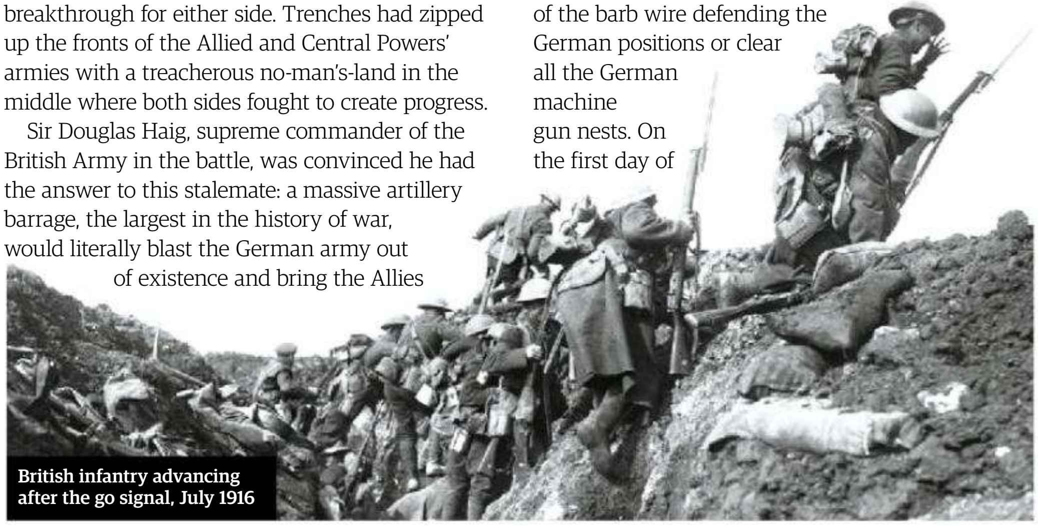
BATTLE OF THE SOMME

1 JULY - 18 NOVEMBER 1916

In terms of body count, the Battle of the Somme represents one of the bloodiest slaughters in military history. The number of troops involved in the battle was staggering and so was the number of casualties. By July 1916, World War I had been grinding on for nearly two years without a breakthrough for either side. Trenches had zipped up the fronts of the Allied and Central Powers' armies with a treacherous no-man's-land in the middle where both sides fought to create progress.

Sir Douglas Haig, supreme commander of the British Army in the battle, was convinced he had the answer to this stalemate: a massive artillery barrage, the largest in the history of war, would literally blast the German army out of existence and bring the Allies an easy victory. Then all the Allied forces would have to do was stroll through no-man's-land and continue on to the destruction of the entire German military. His war-winning strategy was ambitious bordering on fanciful. There was little chance British artillery could lift all of the barb wire defending the German positions or clear all the German machine gun nests. On the first day of the battle alone, the Allies lost seventy thousand men, killed and wounded for little or no tangible gains. Most of these casualties were sustained when Allied troops were 'strolling' through no-man's-land, only to be unceremoniously cut down by German machine-gun fire or blown to bits with artillery shells.

While the attrition successfully wore down the Germans and eventually restricted their ability to wage war on other fronts, the massive and extensive battle still ended in a stalemate after nearly a million men had been killed.



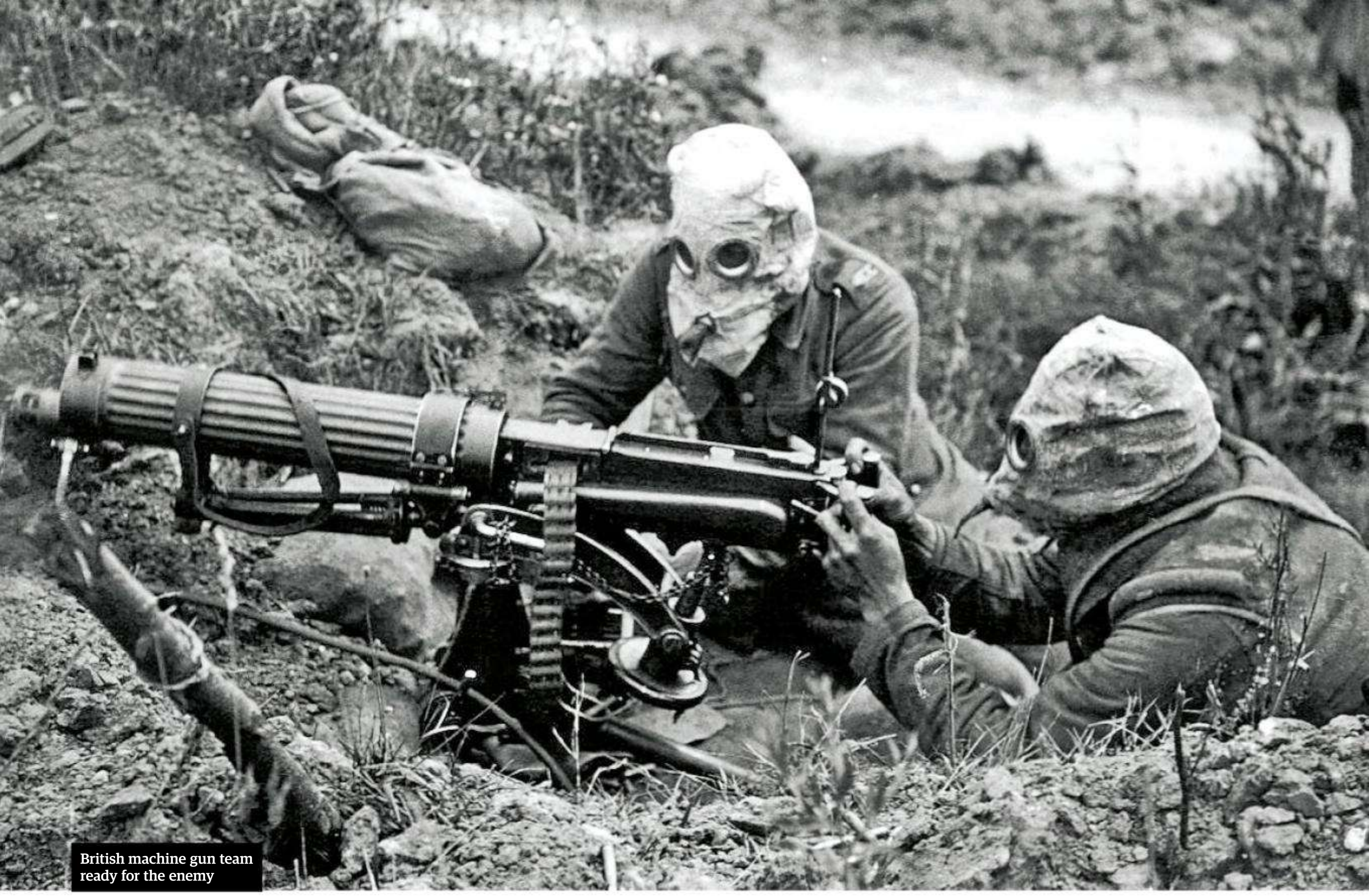
British infantry advancing after the go signal, July 1916

COMBATANTS
British Empire and France **Vs** German Empire

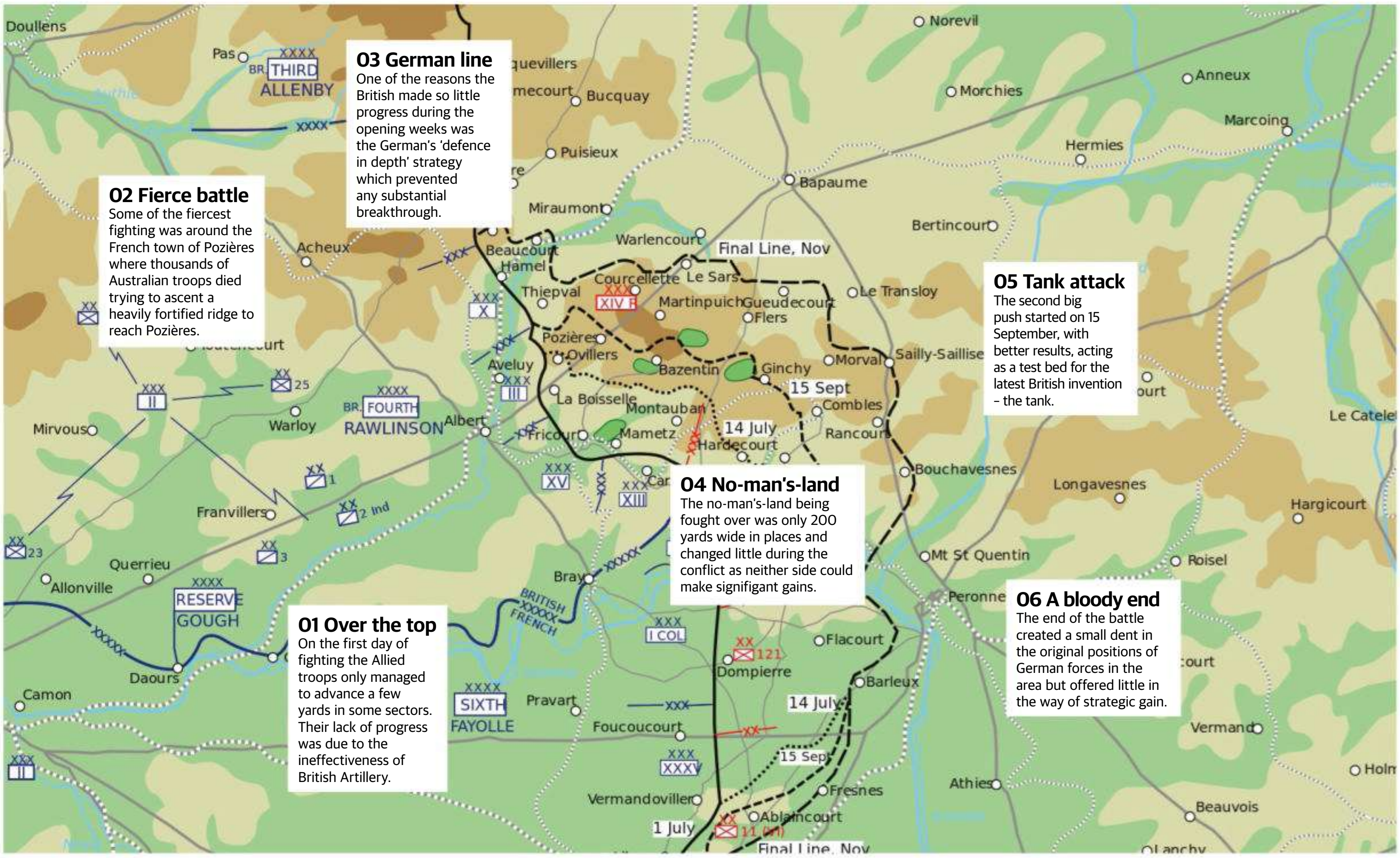
CASUALTIES
British Empire and France: 623,907
German Empire: 400,000-500,000

LEGACY
The tragedy of the Somme was that Haig learned the wrong lessons and became convinced the strategy of attrition was a successful one.

New Zealand infantry resting in a forward trench, September 1916



British machine gun team ready for the enemy



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Mirvous
Fricourt
Mametz
14 July
Hardecourt
XV
XIII
Bouchavesnes
Longavesnes
Le Catelet
Hargicourt
1
2 Ind
Franvillers
23
3
Querrieu
Allonville
RESERVE
GOUGH
Bray
BRITISH
FRENCH
Mt St Quentin
Roisel
Peronne
I COL
121
Dompierre
Flacourt
Barleux
Camon
Daours
SIXTH
FAYOLLE
Pravart
Foucoucourt
14 July
XXXV
15 Sept
Vermand
Athies
Holn
II
Vermandovillers
Fresnes
Ablaincourt
1 July
Beauvois
Final Line, Nov
Lanchy

01 Over the top

On the first day of fighting the Allied troops only managed to advance a few yards in some sectors. Their lack of progress was due to the ineffectiveness of British Artillery.

02 Fierce battle

Some of the fiercest fighting was around the French town of Pozières where thousands of Australian troops died trying to ascent a heavily fortified ridge to reach Pozières.

03 German line

One of the reasons the British made so little progress during the opening weeks was the German's 'defence in depth' strategy which prevented any substantial breakthrough.

04 No-man's-land

The no-man's-land being fought over was only 200 yards wide in places and changed little during the conflict as neither side could make signifigant gains.

05 Tank attack

The second big push started on 15 September, with better results, acting as a test bed for the latest British invention – the tank.

06 A bloody end

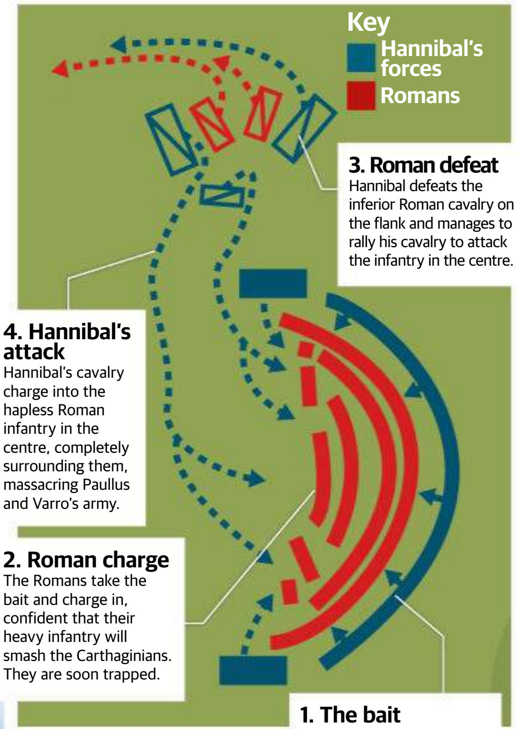
The end of the battle created a small dent in the original positions of German forces in the area but offered little in the way of strategic gain.

BATTLE OF CANNAE 216 BCE

Cannae went down in history as the worst defeat ever experienced by the Roman Republic and its war machine. Roman commanders Lucius Paullus and Gaius Varro were out-smarted and outmanoeuvred by Hannibal of Carthage who used the terrain, the strengths of his Carthaginian troops and the weather to turn the Apulian plain into a killing ground.

In 216 BCE Hannibal – considered by many to be one of the greatest ever military tactician – had crossed the Alps and conquered large parts of Italy and many of the Roman cities within the peninsula had defected to his side to the extent that his armies were threatening Rome itself. The Roman Republic decided that enough was enough; Hannibal would have to be confronted. Paullus and Varro were elected to lead an army to defeat him and restore the honour of Rome. Varro was ambitious, overconfident and anxious to defeat Hannibal and claim victory for himself at the expense of his co-commander. When he met Hannibal's army at Cannae he had nearly forty thousand men behind him and saw no reason to wait and allow Hannibal to slip through his fingers.

Varro lined up his men in a deep formation of heavy infantry designed to smash the Carthaginians and drown them in the Aufidus River that was behind Hannibal's army. However, in his haste for a quick victory he left his flanks dangerously exposed to envelopment and Hannibal seized this opportunity. He quickly attacked the Roman flanks with his better-trained cavalry and told his infantry in the centre to pull back slowly, baiting the Roman infantry to march forward exposing their flanks. As the Romans marched further into the enclosing semicircle Hannibal's men surrounded them and hacked the Romans to pieces. The Romans were hemmed in so tightly they could not bring their heavy shields up to properly defend themselves and they were slaughtered. Some did escape, literally having to cut their way through the Carthaginian horde that had them surrounded. However, most died huddled together in Hannibal's trap, as the ancient Greek scholar Polybius wrote: "As their outer ranks were continually cut down, and the survivors forced to pull back and huddle together, they were finally all killed where they stood."



3. Roman defeat
Hannibal defeats the inferior Roman cavalry on the flank and manages to rally his cavalry to attack the infantry in the centre.

4. Hannibal's attack
Hannibal's cavalry charge into the hapless Roman infantry in the centre, completely surrounding them, massacring Paullus and Varro's army.

2. Roman charge
The Romans take the bait and charge in, confident that their heavy infantry will smash the Carthaginians. They are soon trapped.

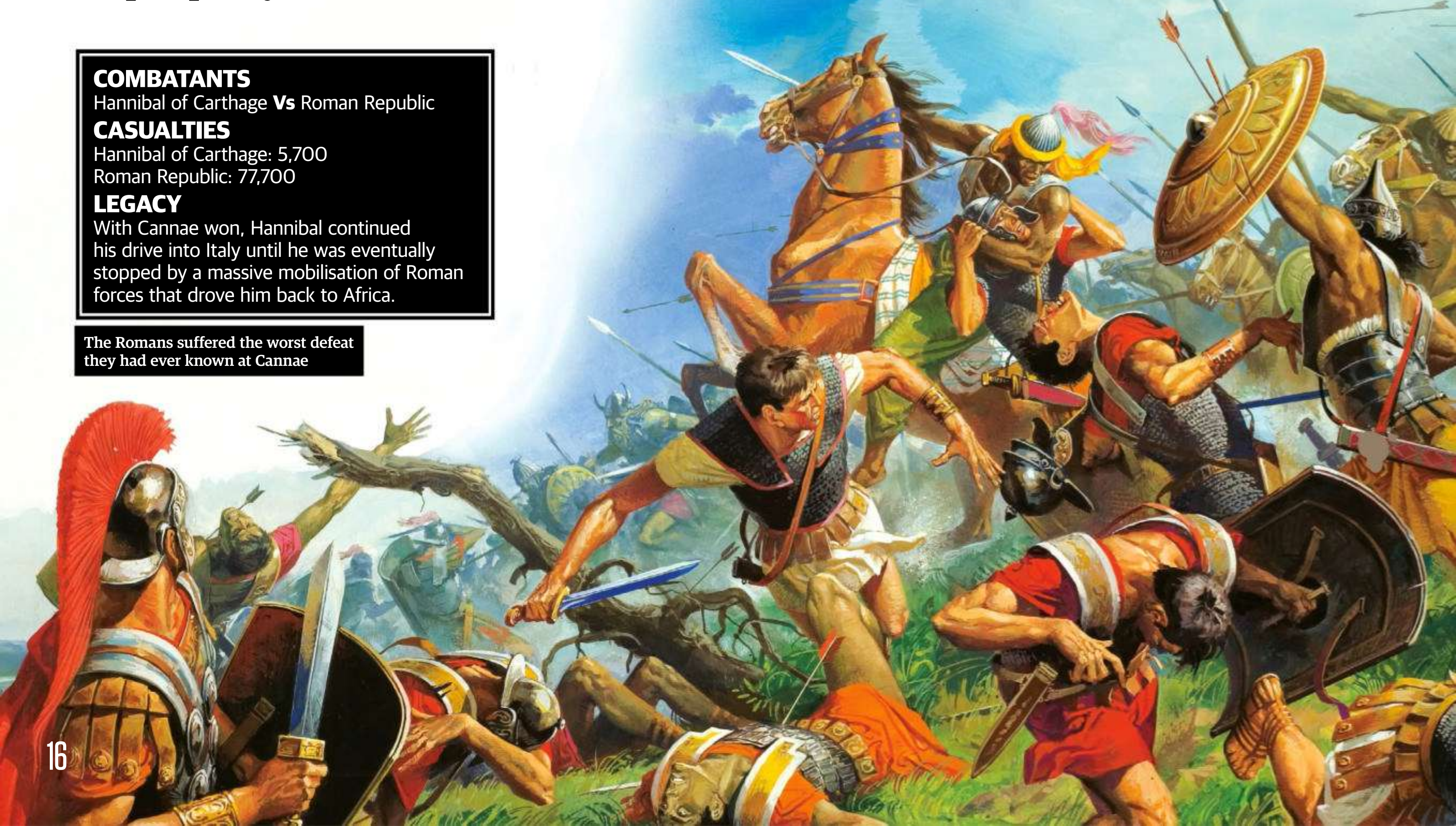
1. The bait
Carthaginian infantry pull back, baiting the Romans to follow and start to attack them on their flanks. They then press inwards surrounding the Romans.

> "The Romans were hemmed in so tightly they could not bring their heavy shields up to properly defend themselves"

COMBATANTS
Hannibal of Carthage **Vs** Roman Republic

CASUALTIES
Hannibal of Carthage: 5,700
Roman Republic: 77,700

LEGACY
With Cannae won, Hannibal continued his drive into Italy until he was eventually stopped by a massive mobilisation of Roman forces that drove him back to Africa.


The Romans suffered the worst defeat they had ever known at Cannae

BATTLE OF STALINGRAD

23 AUGUST 1942 - 2 FEBRUARY 1943

In the grim concrete nightmare of Stalingrad a titanic clash of mechanised military might unfolded, engulfing the city and the whole of southern Russia in a cloud of ash and smoke. It was a battle that decided the fate of the Soviet Union and the future of Hitler's lebensraum in western Russia. Hitler's obsession with taking Stalingrad in the southern Volga defied strategic sense; the city bore little strategic value other than a tractor factory and the name of his greatest adversary – Stalin. Regardless of this he insisted the city was taken, to weaken the moral of the Soviets and presumably end the war on the Eastern Front for good.

The Soviets were in disarray for much of the struggle and at one point only controlled a narrow edge of the city centre with their backs to the Volga river – Nazi victory seemed certain. However, time was on the Red Army's side with German supply lines stretched to the limit and cold weather cutting them off from re-supply. Stalin had also brought up another weapon; his best field commander, General Georgi Zhukov. Hard-drinking and foul-mouthed, Zhukov was the type of bullish uncompromising leader that the Red Army needed to defeat the fascist invader. By November 1942, Zhukov had put a plan in motion to relieve Soviet troops in Stalingrad and encircle the German sixth army. Codenamed Operation Uranus, the Soviets smashed through the German lines at their weakest, where Romanian troops were stationed, and effectively encircled the German troops around Stalingrad, cutting them off from the rest of the German army in Russia and making them vulnerable.

The Red Army in the city was told to hold on at all costs and create a living hell for the Germans. This was achieved through endless sniper attacks, booby traps and constant attrition charges on German lines. As one German NCO put it: "Factory walls, assembly lines, the superstructures collapse under the storm of bombs... but the enemy simply reappears and utilises these newly created ruins to fortify his positions." General Paulus, the commander of the sixth army, radioed back to Germany to try and convince Hitler to allow him to pull back but the Fuehrer would not hear of it. Paulus was told to hold his position or die trying. By February 1943, with most of his army either starving, suffering from late stage frostbite or dead, Paulus surrendered to the Red Army that had completely surrounded him. In Berlin, a mass rally was held to commemorate the heroic sacrifice of the sixth army – the fact that they surrendered was not broadcast in Germany. Stalingrad had been reduced to a tangled carpet of smouldering metal and concrete. In the words of one German officer just before the ceasefire: "Animals flee this hell ... only men endure."

COMBATANTS
The Axis (Germany, Romania, Italy, Hungary, Croatia) **Vs** the Soviet Union

CASUALTIES
The Axis: 850,000
Soviet Union: Approx. 1,150,000

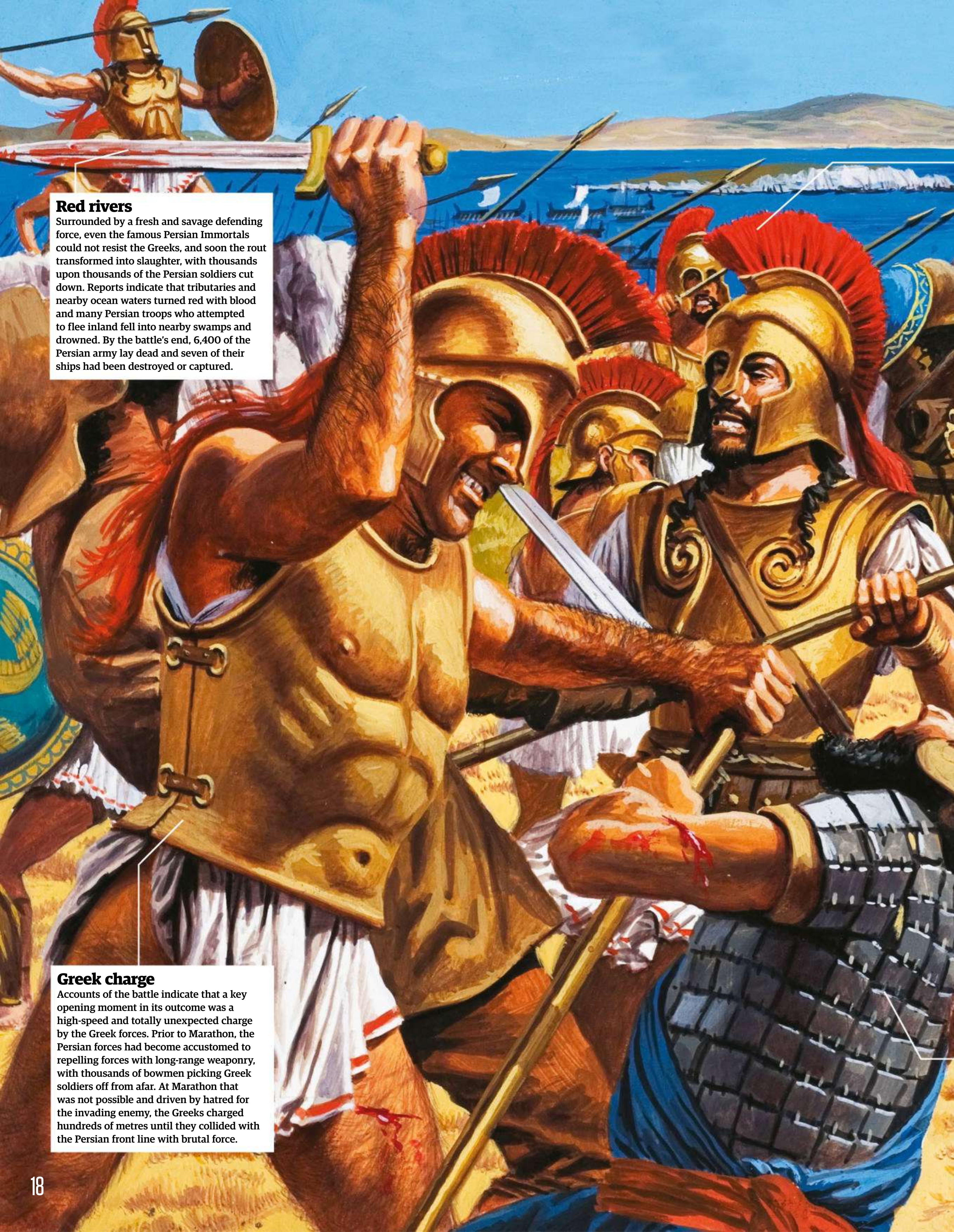
LEGACY
The German army went into decline on the Eastern Front after Stalingrad, allowing the Soviets to go on the offensive.

Intense house-by-house fighting made up the majority of the engagements within Stalingrad

A picture of a well-fed Soviet soldier capturing a frostbitten German combatant

After months of fighting, Stalingrad is finally liberated. The red banner flies over what's left of its square

© Look and Learn; Alamy; Corbis

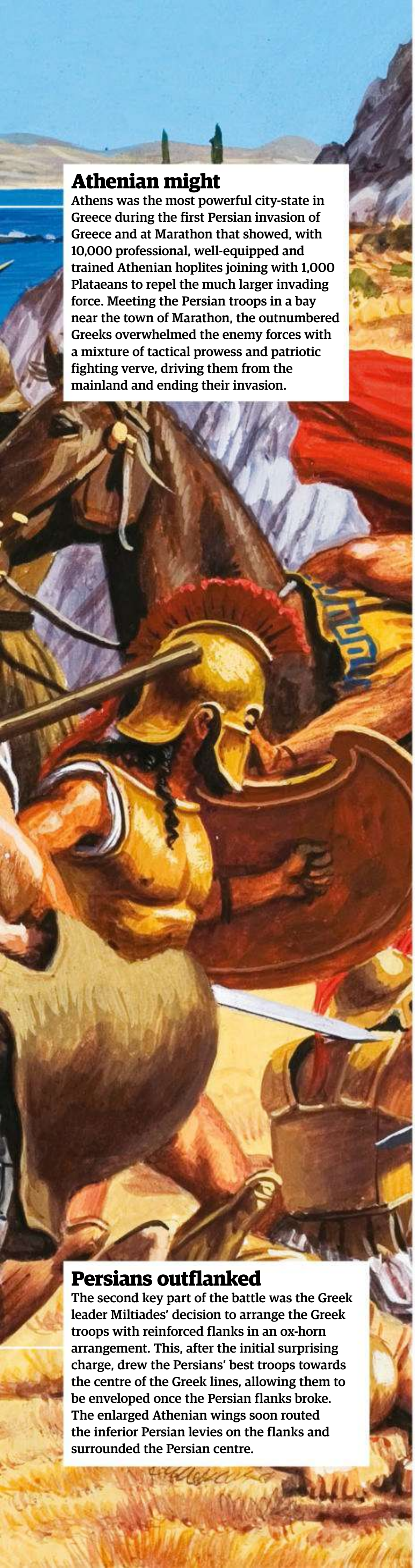


Red rivers

Surrounded by a fresh and savage defending force, even the famous Persian Immortals could not resist the Greeks, and soon the rout transformed into slaughter, with thousands upon thousands of the Persian soldiers cut down. Reports indicate that tributaries and nearby ocean waters turned red with blood and many Persian troops who attempted to flee inland fell into nearby swamps and drowned. By the battle's end, 6,400 of the Persian army lay dead and seven of their ships had been destroyed or captured.

Greek charge

Accounts of the battle indicate that a key opening moment in its outcome was a high-speed and totally unexpected charge by the Greek forces. Prior to Marathon, the Persian forces had become accustomed to repelling forces with long-range weaponry, with thousands of bowmen picking Greek soldiers off from afar. At Marathon that was not possible and driven by hatred for the invading enemy, the Greeks charged hundreds of metres until they collided with the Persian front line with brutal force.



Athenian might
Athens was the most powerful city-state in Greece during the first Persian invasion of Greece and at Marathon that showed, with 10,000 professional, well-equipped and trained Athenian hoplites joining with 1,000 Plataeans to repel the much larger invading force. Meeting the Persian troops in a bay near the town of Marathon, the outnumbered Greeks overwhelmed the enemy forces with a mixture of tactical prowess and patriotic fighting verve, driving them from the mainland and ending their invasion.

Persians outflanked
The second key part of the battle was the Greek leader Miltiades' decision to arrange the Greek troops with reinforced flanks in an ox-horn arrangement. This, after the initial surprising charge, drew the Persians' best troops towards the centre of the Greek lines, allowing them to be enveloped once the Persian flanks broke. The enlarged Athenian wings soon routed the inferior Persian levies on the flanks and surrounded the Persian centre.

BATTLE OF MARATHON

MARATHON, GREECE SEPTEMBER 490 BCE

Long before those 300 Spartans held Persian king Xerxes I at the Hot Gates, another battle between Greece and Persia saw the Greeks withstanding the greatest military force the Earth had ever seen and consequently helped secure a democracy in its fledgling years. After all, Xerxes' burning desire to subjugate Greece was bestowed upon him by his father Darius I whose troops, starting in 492 BCE, began making their way to the Greek mainland while besieging any Greek islands and cities their massive fleet came across.

The Persian fleet dispatched by Darius I was colossal. According to Herodotus, the Persian invasion force consisted of 600 triremes, which could hold a fighting force numbering between 25,000 and 100,000 men. The Greeks had never seen this scale of force before and, as news broke of its various scalps on its way to the mainland – including the crushing of the Ionian revolt in Asia Minor – fear and concern grew. If the might of Persia came knocking on the doors of Athens, the voice of the people's ideology they were currently cultivating would be eradicated; the dream of democracy crushed under Darius' foot.

By 490 BCE, the invaders – led by admiral Datis and Darius' own brother Artaphernes – had brought the Greek Cyclades islands under Persian control, besieged and sacked the city of Eretria and were now headed for Athens itself. Darius had long wanted to punish Athens for aiding the Ionian revolt and generally resisting Persia's expansion into the West, so taking down Athens would be the feather in the proverbial hat. Buoyed by his resounding victory at Eretria, Datis made a beeline for the Greek capital.

Datis chose the bay of Marathon to land his invading force. It was near the small town of Marathon and lay roughly 40 kilometres (25 miles) from the Athens. In response, the Athenians quickly dispatched their most experienced general, Miltiades, along with 10,000 soldiers. The Greek strategy was to block the Persian army at Marathon and prevent their ingress. Meanwhile, help from Sparta would be sent for, with the larger Persian army checked until the Spartans and Athenians could unite and eradicate the invading force.

Arriving at Marathon, Miltiades quickly put the Greek plan in action, blocking off the exits and bracing for a Persian attack. For five days that attack didn't come, and while this puzzled Miltiades and his generals, they were unconcerned as each day that passed brought the Spartan support troops closer. The reason Datis delayed his attack is not documented in historical sources, but it is believed that indecision regarding how the Persians' deadly cavalry should be used was a primary factor.

What is clear is that little of the Persian cavalry was deployed at Marathon and, on the fifth day of stalemate, something gave. Whether Miltiades realised that without cavalry the Persians were vulnerable to a direct charge and decided to move against them, or that Datis grew impatient and pressed the offensive is not known. But on the fifth day the Greeks charged down the Persian enemy in a massive shock assault, breaking their weak flanks and enveloping their centre. Indeed, despite being outnumbered two to one, the Greeks secured a decisive victory.

The fallout from Marathon was huge. The Persians, who the Greeks expected to make a resurgent attack on Athens, were so badly broken by the battle that instead they were forced to return straight back to Persia, angering King Darius I greatly and setting in train the second Persian invasion of Greece, undertaken by Xerxes after Darius' death. By contrast, the victory at Marathon was a defining moment for the young Athenian democracy, kick-starting a golden age for the city that would last almost 300 years.

Persia

TROOPS 25,000

CAVALRY 1,000

LOSSES 6,400

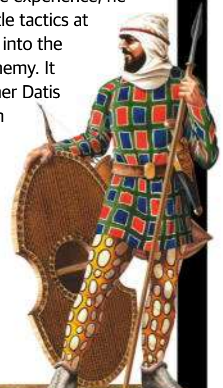
KEY LEADER

DATIS

The Median admiral who led the first campaign of the Persian Wars. While he had some battle experience, he misjudged his battle tactics at Marathon, playing into the strengths of his enemy. It is unknown whether Datis survived Marathon or not.

Strength: Personally commanded the elite Persian Immortal troops.

Weakness: Overly confident; one-note tactician.



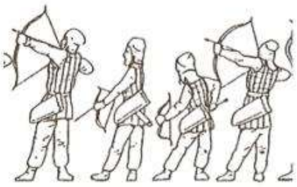
KEY UNIT

PERSIAN IMMORTAL

The elite fighting force of the Achaemenid Empire. Lightly armoured, their agility and razor-sharp swords and daggers made them fearsome foes. They could supposedly not be beaten in battle.

Strength: Elite fighters; excelled in both long and short-range combat.

Weakness: Not actually immortal.



SECONDARY UNIT

ARCHER

Darius' missile troops were the best archers in the world. They frequently racked up many kills at long-range. The Greeks' bronze breastplates and large shields caused them more problems, however.

Strength: Capable of picking off enemy troops from afar.

Weakness: Poor armour; little short-range combat ability.

01 BATTLE LINES DRAWN

The last battle of the first Persian invasion of Greece began with the two armies closing to a distance of 1,500 metres (4,900 feet), the Greek forces arranged in a defensive formation pinning the Persian army against the coast. If the Persians managed to get around, then Athens and all of Greece was theirs for the taking.

02 Stacking the flanks

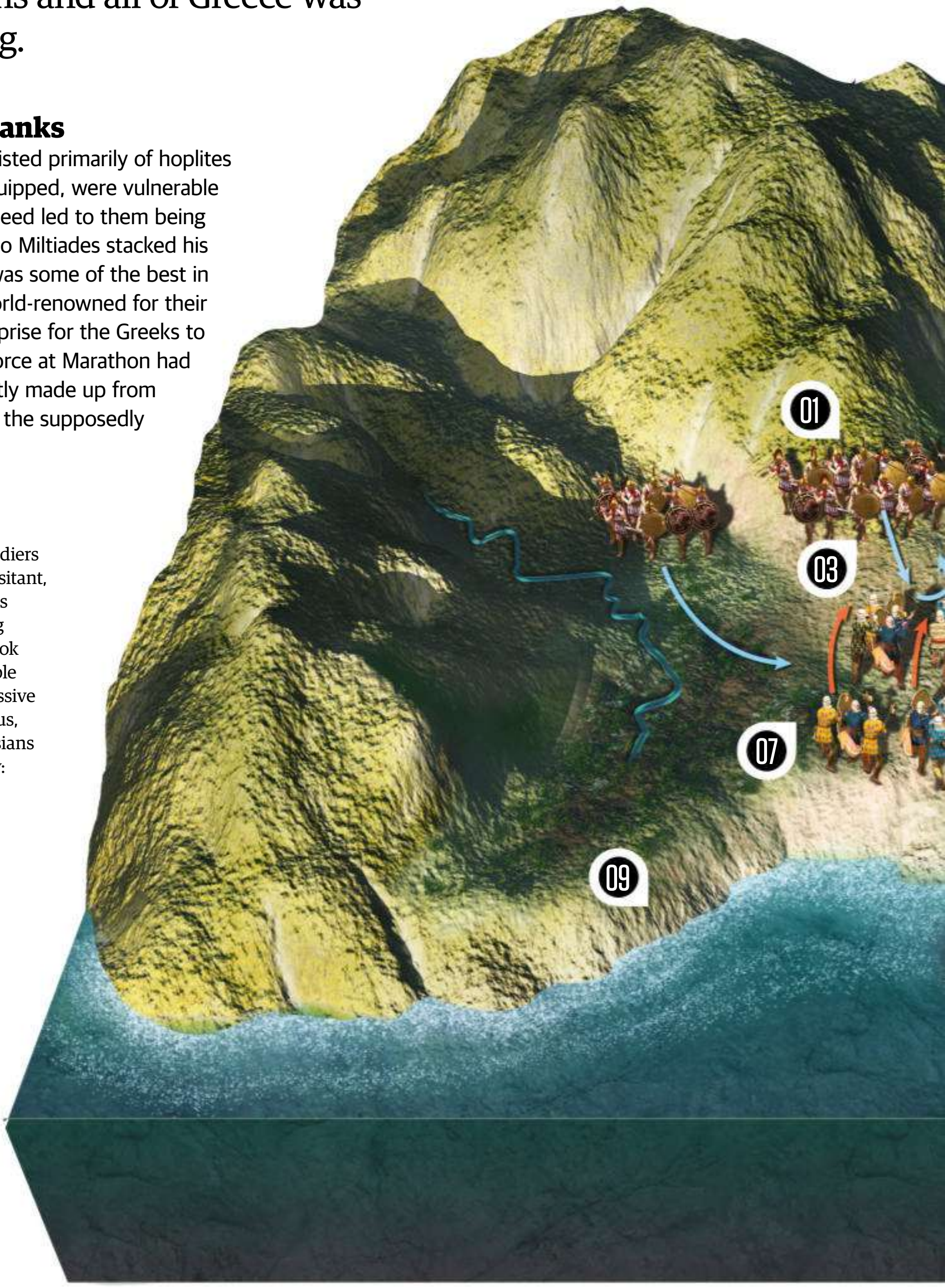
The Greek army consisted primarily of hoplites who, while well-trained and equipped, were vulnerable to cavalry, whose agility and speed led to them being easily outflanked in the open, so Miltiades stacked his forces' flanks. Persian cavalry was some of the best in the world, with their horses world-renowned for their speed. It must have been a surprise for the Greeks to see that the invading Persian force at Marathon had almost no cavalry, instead mostly made up from archers and Persian Immortals, the supposedly indestructible elite fighters.

03 "At them!"

Despite outnumbering the Greek soldiers two to one, Persian force seemed hesitant, refusing to initiate battle, probably as they had little experience in fighting Greek hoplites up close. Miltiades took advantage of this and with one simple order: "At them", he unleashed a massive Greek charge. According to Herodotus, the Greek troops charged at the Persians while shouting their famous war cry: "Eleleu! Eleleu!"

04 A rain of arrows unleashed

Upon the instigation of the charge Datis immediately ordered his archers to fire upon the advancing horde, who appeared to be on a suicide mission. Upon his order, a huge barrage of missiles were unleashed that rained down upon the advancing Greeks. However, due to the speed at which the Greeks were advancing, the inability of the Persians to retreat backwards to gain a better firing position and the sturdy armour and shields carried by their enemy, the casualties were few.



05 Brutal first impact

The impact of the Greek charge was devastating. The Athenian hoplites had honed their battle prowess against other Greeks who fought in phalanxes, with large shields and bronze armour. However, the Persians – especially their archers – merely wore cloth and quilted jerkins and when Miltiades and his men connected, there was nothing but the sound of metal crashing into flesh and bone. The Persians troops were completely unprepared for such an assault and the initial shock left their battle line in tatters.

06 A bronze wave

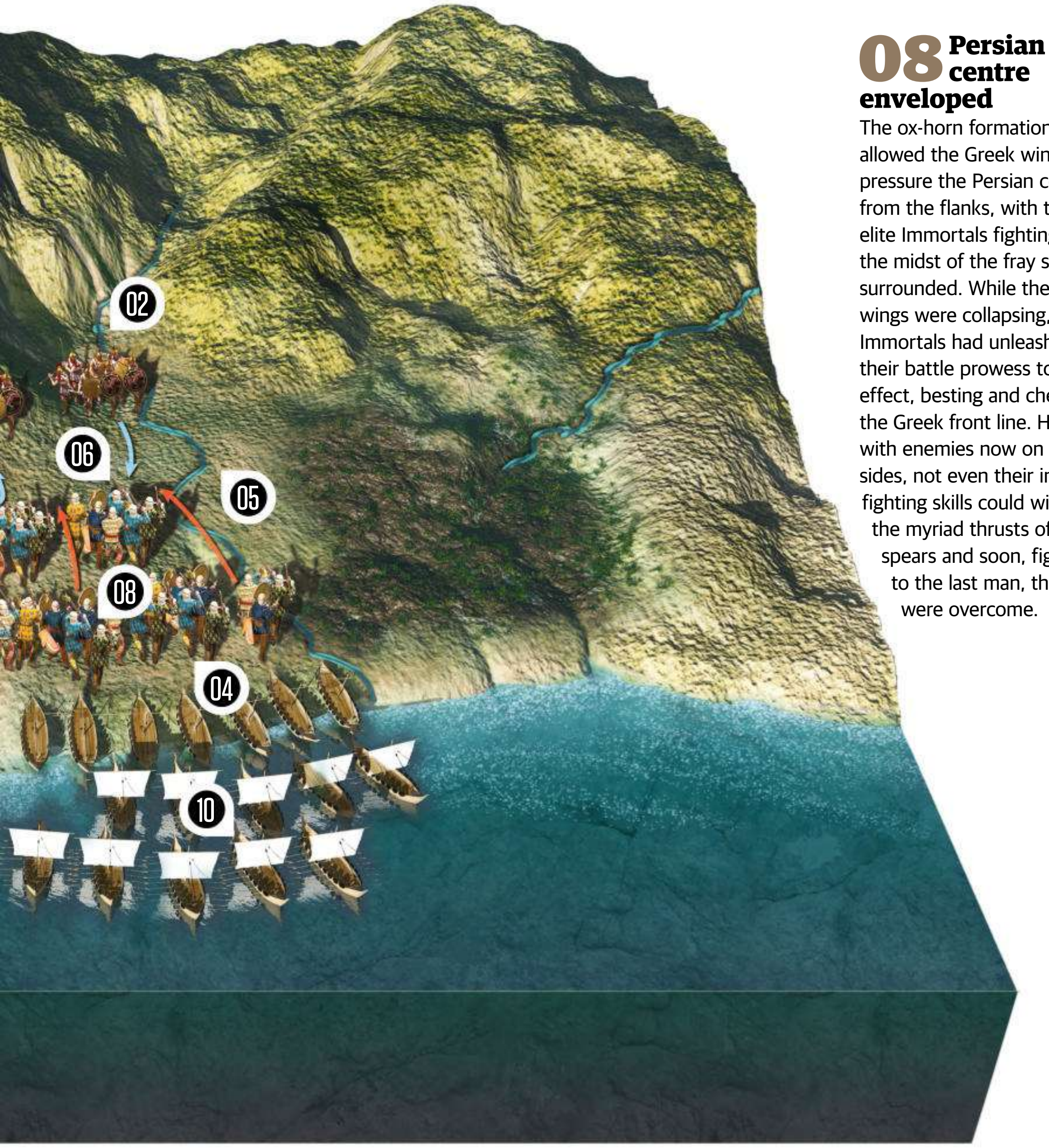
The bronze wave of Athenian breastplates pushed forwards. Datis redistributed his best fighters, the feared Persian Immortals, to shore it up. For a little while, this succeeded, checking Miltiades in his continuous advance toward the moored Persian fleet.

10 Persian fleet flees

After capturing seven Persian ships, the Greeks had their victory, watching the tattered remnants of the invading force sail away into the Aegean Sea. The body count told a tale of one of the most crushing victories the Greeks had ever scored. 6,400 dead Persians were counted lying on the battlefield, while only 203 Greeks had perished. But Miltiades had no time to bury the dead and immediately ordered his troops to begin their march back to the undefended Athens in case of a reprisal. No attack came, though; the first Persian invasion of Greece had ended.

09 Drowned in the swamps

Upon the collapse of the Persian centre, the remaining Persian troops began to flee. Most fled to their moored ships and were chased and harassed by the Greeks, with many of them cut down as they retreated. Others, who had been cut off from making a dash for the vessels, fled inland and - unfamiliar with the local terrain - fell into a series of nearby swamps and drowned. Whether Datis died on the battlefield at Marathon, fled back to Persia or drowned is unknown to this day.



08 Persian centre enveloped

The ox-horn formation allowed the Greek wings to pressure the Persian centre from the flanks, with the elite Immortals fighting in the midst of the fray soon surrounded. While the Persian wings were collapsing, the Immortals had unleashed their battle prowess to deadly effect, besting and checking the Greek front line. However, with enemies now on all sides, not even their insane fighting skills could withstand the myriad thrusts of Greek spears and soon, fighting to the last man, they were overcome.

07 PERSIAN WINGS ROUTED

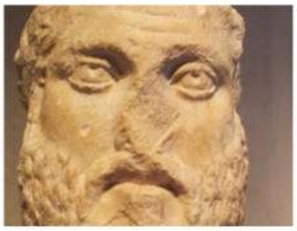
With Datis' best fighters now holding up the remains of the Persian centre, their wings were poorly protected. Miltiades, who had stocked his wings in defence of the Athenians being out-flanked, took advantage.

Greece

TROOPS 10,000

CAVALRY UNKNOWN

LOSSES 203



LEADER

MILTIADES

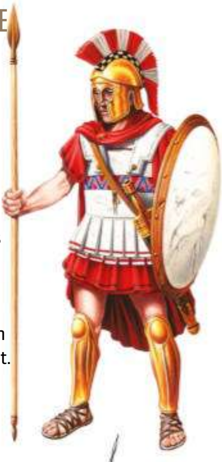
A renowned Olympic chariot racer. His aggressive tactics at Marathon won the battle, but his temperament and high opinion of himself would lead to his downfall, with political rivals in Athens charging him with treason. He died in prison.

Strength: Tactical leader with great war experience.

Weakness: High self-esteem could lead to rashness on the field.

KEY UNIT

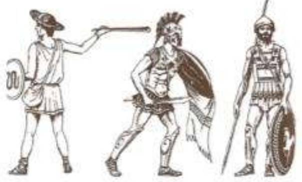
ATHENIAN HOPLITE



Citizen soldiers renowned for their professionalism, Greek hoplites fought with spear and shield. Their primary battle tactic was facing the enemy in formations such as the phalanx.

Strength: Well-trained and equipped; excelled in close-quarter combat.

Weakness: Few in numbers compared to enemy forces.



SECONDARY UNIT

SLAVE

Convicts were often offered military service as a way to escape prison, with many taking up the offer and joining the hoplites. However, they usually died before achieving this.

Strength: Driven by freedom, granted by successful military service.

Weakness: Ill-disciplined; equipped with basic weaponry.

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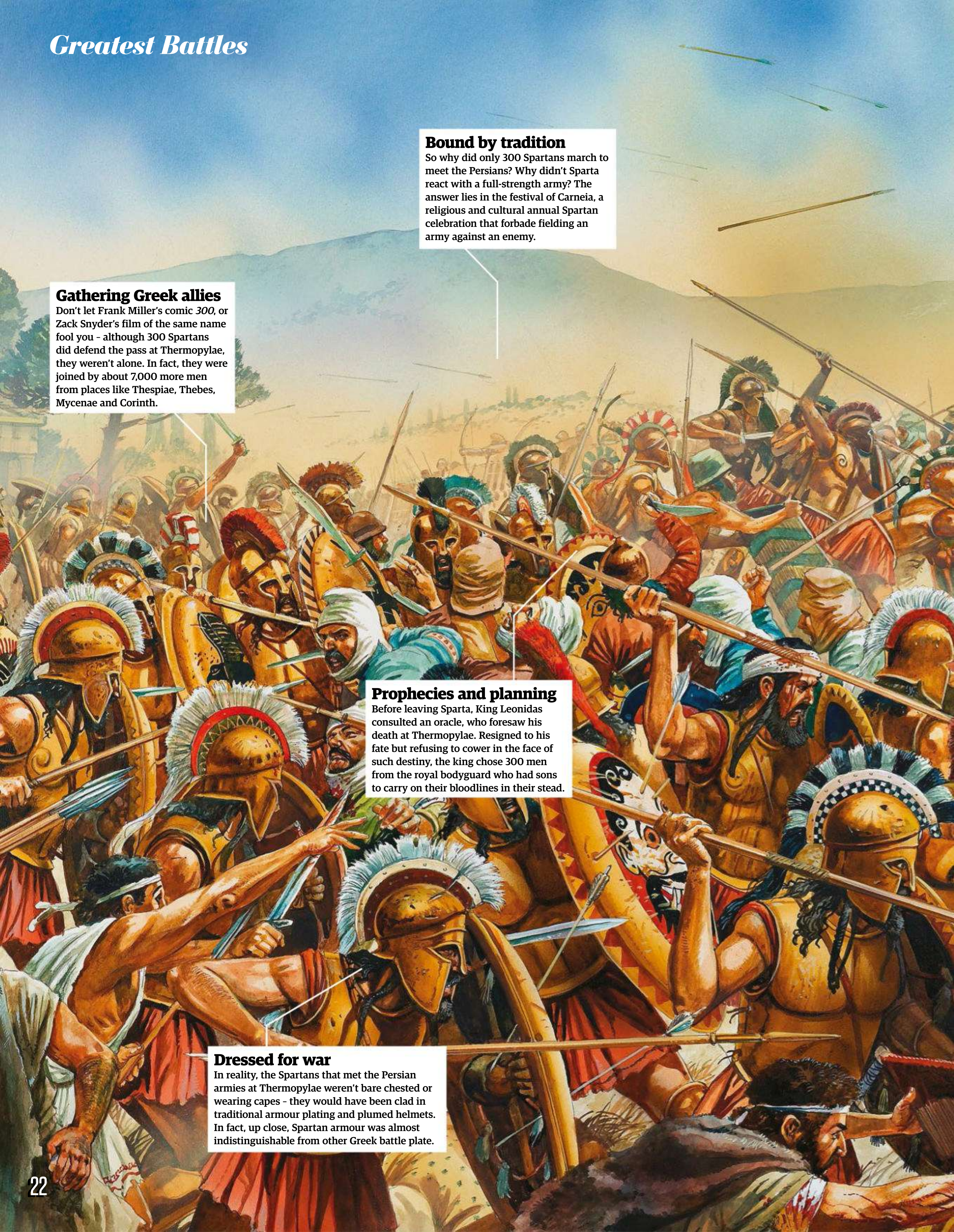


Bound by tradition

So why did only 300 Spartans march to meet the Persians? Why didn't Sparta react with a full-strength army? The answer lies in the festival of Carneia, a religious and cultural annual Spartan celebration that forbade fielding an army against an enemy.

Gathering Greek allies

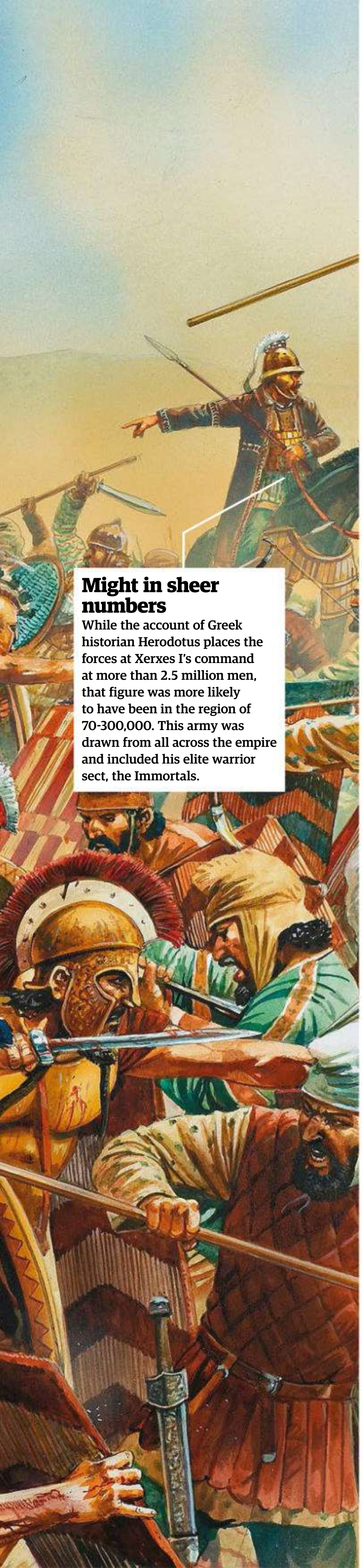
Don't let Frank Miller's comic *300*, or Zack Snyder's film of the same name fool you – although 300 Spartans did defend the pass at Thermopylae, they weren't alone. In fact, they were joined by about 7,000 more men from places like Thespiae, Thebes, Mycenae and Corinth.

Prophecies and planning

Before leaving Sparta, King Leonidas consulted an oracle, who foresaw his death at Thermopylae. Resigned to his fate but refusing to cower in the face of such destiny, the king chose 300 men from the royal bodyguard who had sons to carry on their bloodlines in their stead.

Dressed for war

In reality, the Spartans that met the Persian armies at Thermopylae weren't bare chested or wearing capes – they would have been clad in traditional armour plating and plumed helmets. In fact, up close, Spartan armour was almost indistinguishable from other Greek battle plate.



Might in sheer numbers
While the account of Greek historian Herodotus places the forces at Xerxes I's command at more than 2.5 million men, that figure was more likely to have been in the region of 70-300,000. This army was drawn from all across the empire and included his elite warrior sect, the Immortals.

BATTLE OF THERMOPYLAE

THERMOPYLAE, GREECE 480 BCE

Immortalised on stage, screen and the pages of literature and sequential art, the battle between 300 war-hardened Spartans and the armies of the entire Persian Empire has rightfully become the stuff of legend. The fact that such a confrontation can be called a 'battle' considering the sheer one-sided nature of the participants gives you some idea just how brutally efficient the warriors of Greece truly were. The Battle of Thermopylae was one of many skirmishes of the Greco-Persian Wars, a series of conflicts that raged between the Achaemenid Empire of Persia and the free city-states of Greece between 499 BCE and 449 BCE.

The Persian Empire had risen around the mid-6th century BCE and expanded exponentially across Asia, Europe and the Mediterranean; eventually its eyes fell on the fragmented states of Greece. Established by Cyrus the Great in 550 BCE, the Achaemenid Empire (also known as the First Persian Empire) became the largest imperial domain of the ancient world thanks to its impressive armies that swelled with every new territory conquered.

For the Persians, Greece remained a distant principality of little consideration, but a political misunderstanding between the two would set the stage for war and invasion. The Persian monarch, King Darius, demanded gifts of water and earth from every known land as symbols of their obedience and would send emissaries across the Persian Empire and beyond to collect them. One such emissary was met by the Greeks, and believing the man had come to organise an alliance with Persia, he was duly sent back to his masters with a suitable offering in tow.

When news of the Greek pledge reached the Athenian Assembly – the governmental construct that oversaw the running of Athenian society – it immediately distanced itself from the offering, keen to preserve its status of independence. Upon hearing of the foreign principality's refusal to recognise his sovereignty, the Persian monarch dispatched a fleet to bring the rebels to heel.

The campaign proved a disaster for Darius when his armies were defeated by the Greeks at the Battle of Marathon in 490 BCE, and when the king died four years later, it fell to his son Xerxes to continue the campaign. Xerxes I spent four years amassing a grand army powerful enough to subdue all Greece and the defiant Athenians.

The Athenians knew the might of the Persian war hammer would strike, so in 482 BCE, a plan was put in place to build a huge fleet of ships to tackle the Persian sea offensive. However, Athens realised it could not fight on both sea *and* land, and sought an alliance of sorts with one of the other Greek states that had rejected Persian advances – Sparta. The Spartans were a hardy breed, born fighters who trained from childhood to kill with brutal efficiency. Despite the cultural and political differences between the two peoples, they agreed a coalition with Athens.

The alliance soon learned that Xerxes I's mighty army, believed to have been between 70,000 and 300,000-strong, would pass through the narrow southern pass of Thermopylae. A plan was devised to funnel the Persians in that pass and use the brutal ground tactics of the Greeks to weather the storm and drive the invaders out of Greece.

Greek city-states

TROOPS 7,000

CAVALRY 0

KING LEONIDAS I

LEADER

Plutarch tells us that the fearsome Spartan leader uttered the iconic phrase, "Tonight, we dine in Hell!" at the battle.

Strengths Superior infantry tactics and training; use of the Phalanx.

Weakness Sparta was forbidden from going to battle during Carneia, so could only send 300 men.

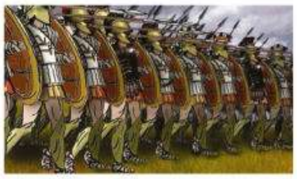
THESPIAN ARMY

UNIT

King Demophilus of Thespiae brought 700 of his men to support the Spartans at Thermopylae.

Strengths Strong allies with the state of Sparta, Thespian men worked well with the Spartans.

Weakness Demophilus, like Leonidas, fought with his men at Thermopylae, so was vulnerable from the start.



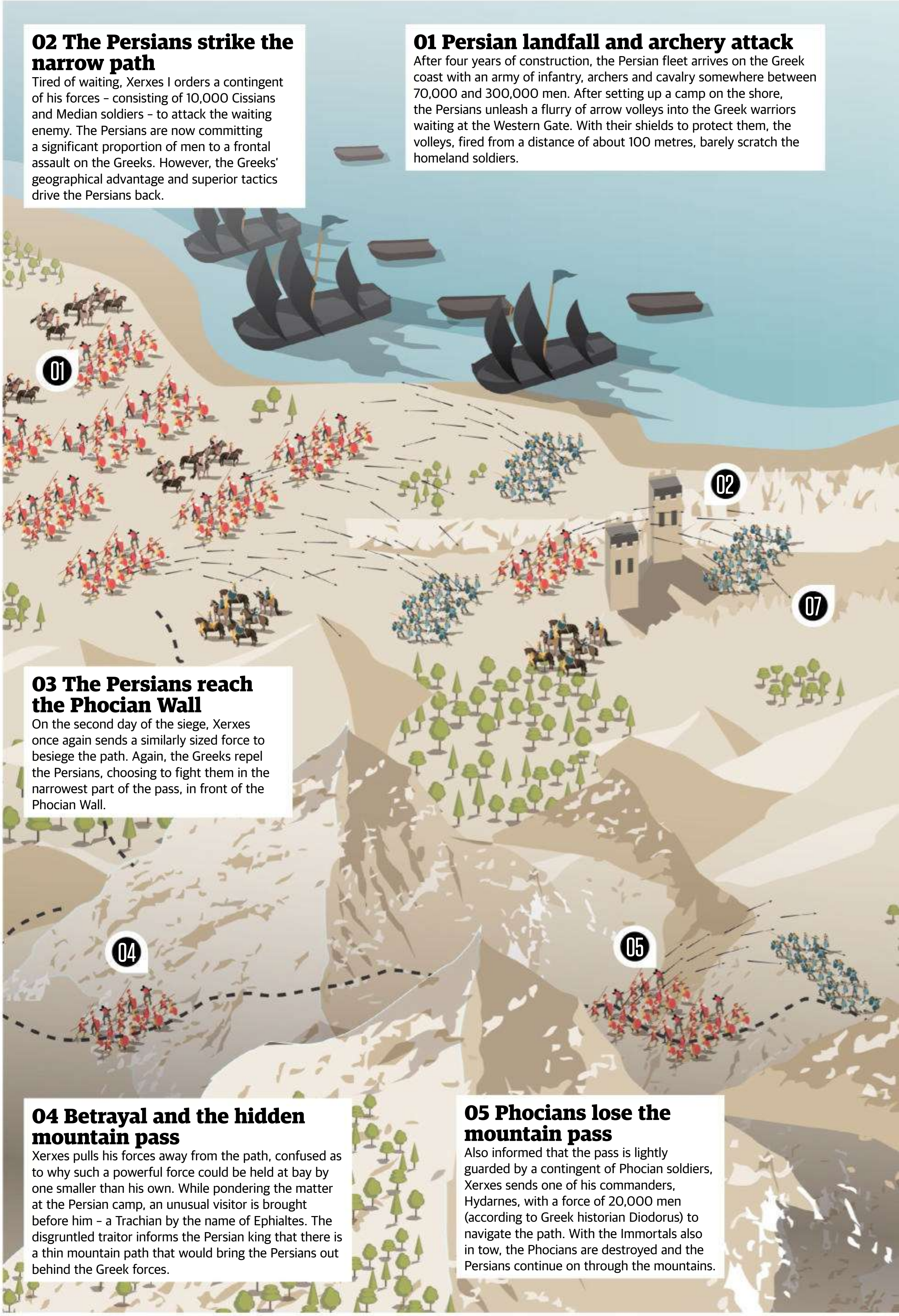
THE PHALANX

KEY WEAPON

This battle tactic (later mirrored by the Romans) saw the Greeks create an impenetrable 'box' of overlapped shields and spears.

Strengths Being protected against archer volleys enabled Spartans to push infantry and cavalry back.

Weakness Could be slow moving, allowing cavalry to circle and attack.



01 Persian landfall and archery attack

After four years of construction, the Persian fleet arrives on the Greek coast with an army of infantry, archers and cavalry somewhere between 70,000 and 300,000 men. After setting up a camp on the shore, the Persians unleash a flurry of arrow volleys into the Greek warriors waiting at the Western Gate. With their shields to protect them, the volleys, fired from a distance of about 100 metres, barely scratch the homeland soldiers.

02 The Persians strike the narrow path

Tired of waiting, Xerxes I orders a contingent of his forces – consisting of 10,000 Cissians and Median soldiers – to attack the waiting enemy. The Persians are now committing a significant proportion of men to a frontal assault on the Greeks. However, the Greeks' geographical advantage and superior tactics drive the Persians back.

03 The Persians reach the Phocian Wall

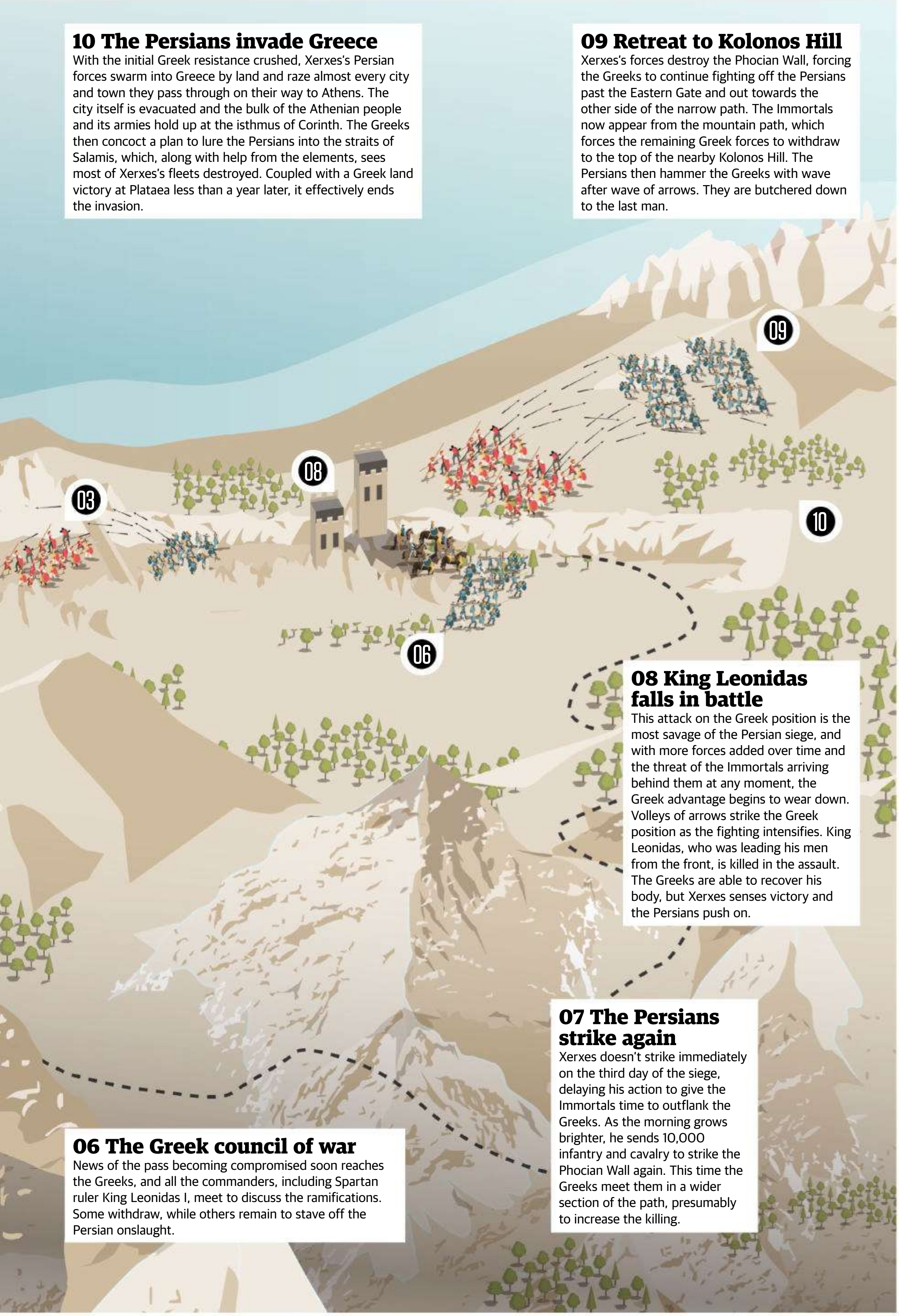
On the second day of the siege, Xerxes once again sends a similarly sized force to besiege the path. Again, the Greeks repel the Persians, choosing to fight them in the narrowest part of the pass, in front of the Phocian Wall.

04 Betrayal and the hidden mountain pass

Xerxes pulls his forces away from the path, confused as to why such a powerful force could be held at bay by one smaller than his own. While pondering the matter at the Persian camp, an unusual visitor is brought before him – a Trachian by the name of Ephialtes. The disgruntled traitor informs the Persian king that there is a thin mountain path that would bring the Persians out behind the Greek forces.

05 Phocians lose the mountain pass

Also informed that the pass is lightly guarded by a contingent of Phocian soldiers, Xerxes sends one of his commanders, Hydarnes, with a force of 20,000 men (according to Greek historian Diodorus) to navigate the path. With the Immortals also in tow, the Phocians are destroyed and the Persians continue on through the mountains.



06 The Greek council of war

News of the pass becoming compromised soon reaches the Greeks, and all the commanders, including Spartan ruler King Leonidas I, meet to discuss the ramifications. Some withdraw, while others remain to stave off the Persian onslaught.

07 The Persians strike again

Xerxes doesn't strike immediately on the third day of the siege, delaying his action to give the Immortals time to outflank the Greeks. As the morning grows brighter, he sends 10,000 infantry and cavalry to strike the Phocian Wall again. This time the Greeks meet them in a wider section of the path, presumably to increase the killing.

08 King Leonidas falls in battle

This attack on the Greek position is the most savage of the Persian siege, and with more forces added over time and the threat of the Immortals arriving behind them at any moment, the Greek advantage begins to wear down. Volleys of arrows strike the Greek position as the fighting intensifies. King Leonidas, who was leading his men from the front, is killed in the assault. The Greeks are able to recover his body, but Xerxes senses victory and the Persians push on.

09 Retreat to Kolonos Hill

Xerxes's forces destroy the Phocian Wall, forcing the Greeks to continue fighting off the Persians past the Eastern Gate and out towards the other side of the narrow path. The Immortals now appear from the mountain path, which forces the remaining Greek forces to withdraw to the top of the nearby Kolonos Hill. The Persians then hammer the Greeks with wave after wave of arrows. They are butchered down to the last man.

10 The Persians invade Greece

With the initial Greek resistance crushed, Xerxes's Persian forces swarm into Greece by land and raze almost every city and town they pass through on their way to Athens. The city itself is evacuated and the bulk of the Athenian people and its armies hold up at the isthmus of Corinth. The Greeks then concoct a plan to lure the Persians into the straits of Salamis, which, along with help from the elements, sees most of Xerxes's fleets destroyed. Coupled with a Greek land victory at Plataea less than a year later, it effectively ends the invasion.

Achaemenid Empire of Persia

TROOPS 70-300,000

CAVALRY 14-60,000

XERXES I OF PERSIA

LEADER

Xerxes's fevered army building was the result of a prophetic dream urging him to go to war with the defiant Greeks.

Strengths Sheer numbers, his use of cavalry and the variety of troops – including the Immortals.

Weakness Narrow pass at Thermopylae made it difficult for such a large army to progress.

THE IMMORTALS

UNIT

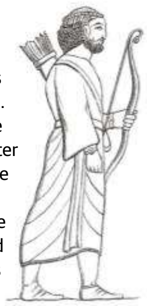
The Immortals were Xerxes's elite bodyguards and were skilled in close-quarters combat and archery.

Strengths According to Herodotus, the Immortals were always 10,000 strong in number.

Weakness Fought wrapped only in cloth (they didn't wear any armour) and used wicker shields.

COMPOSITE BOW

KEY WEAPON

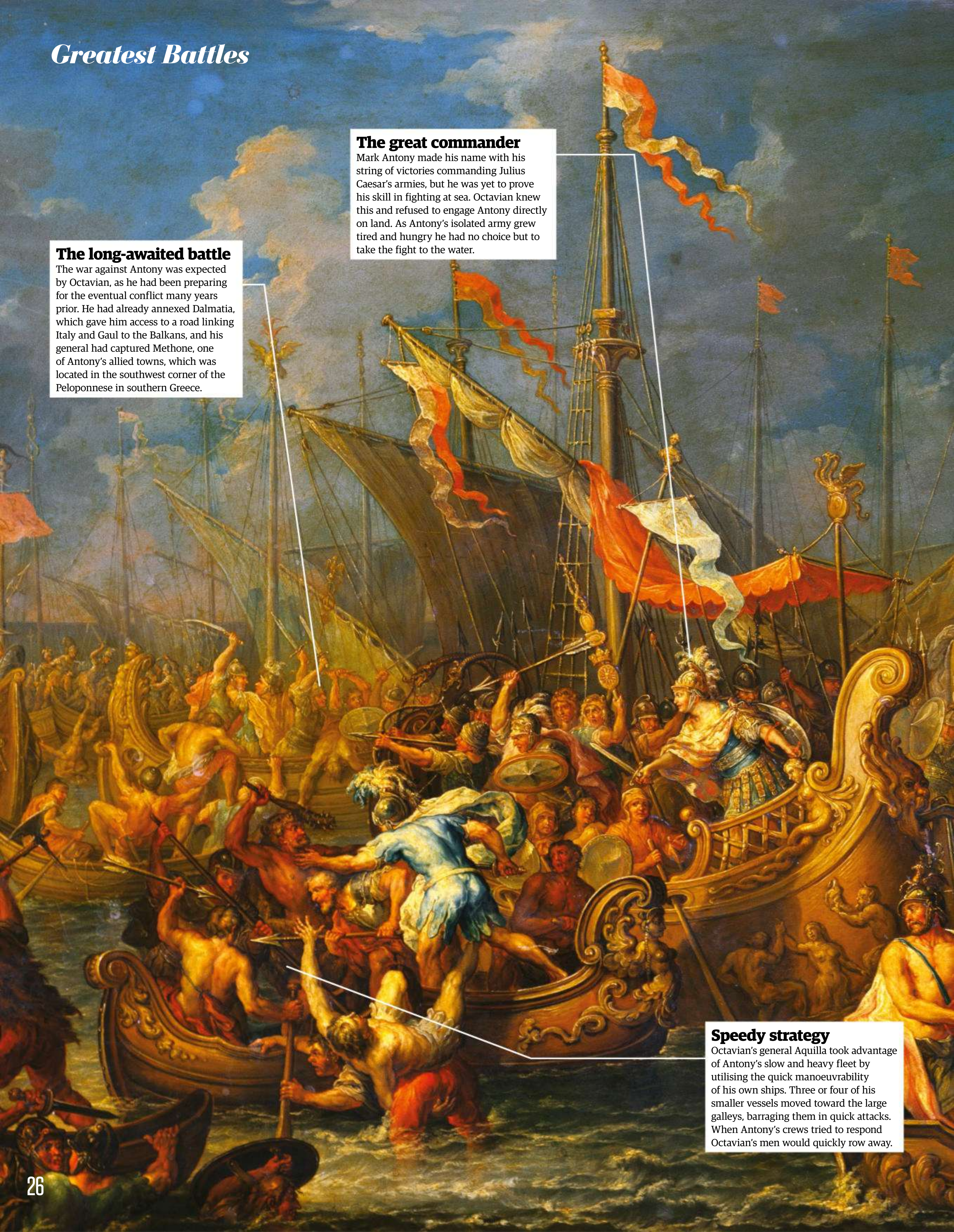


A popular ranged weapon, it was one of a number of bows used by the Persians.

Strengths Could be crafted to yield greater strength and distance for its user.

Weakness Sensitive to moisture, so could fall apart and lose its power in rain.

© Corbis, Edward Crooks



The great commander

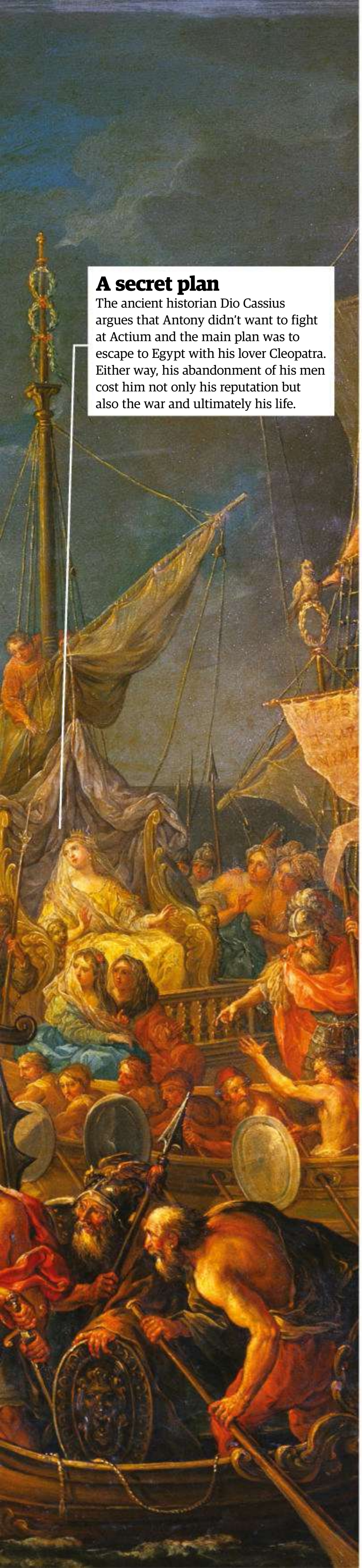
Mark Antony made his name with his string of victories commanding Julius Caesar's armies, but he was yet to prove his skill in fighting at sea. Octavian knew this and refused to engage Antony directly on land. As Antony's isolated army grew tired and hungry he had no choice but to take the fight to the water.

The long-awaited battle

The war against Antony was expected by Octavian, as he had been preparing for the eventual conflict many years prior. He had already annexed Dalmatia, which gave him access to a road linking Italy and Gaul to the Balkans, and his general had captured Methone, one of Antony's allied towns, which was located in the southwest corner of the Peloponnese in southern Greece.

Speedy strategy

Octavian's general Aquilla took advantage of Antony's slow and heavy fleet by utilising the quick manoeuvrability of his own ships. Three or four of his smaller vessels moved toward the large galleys, barraging them in quick attacks. When Antony's crews tried to respond Octavian's men would quickly row away.



A secret plan

The ancient historian Dio Cassius argues that Antony didn't want to fight at Actium and the main plan was to escape to Egypt with his lover Cleopatra. Either way, his abandonment of his men cost him not only his reputation but also the war and ultimately his life.

BATTLE OF ACTIUM

IONIAN SEA 2 SEPTEMBER 31 BCE

The year was 44 BCE and Julius Caesar was dead. The great Roman leader had been slaughtered on the Senate floor by a number of assassins, including his old allies Brutus and Cassius, and his nation was plunged into a brutal and violent civil war. In this power vacuum three men came together and formed a ruling force known as the Second Triumvirate - Octavian, Caesar's adopted son and legal heir ruled the west, Mark Antony, the beloved general ruled the east and Lepidus, a close ally of Caesar's, oversaw North Africa. After crushing the assassins and the rumblings of those who wished a return to the ways of the old Republic, peace finally seemed to have been restored in Rome.

Not everything was as it seemed, though. Under the surface unrest was bubbling between Octavian and general Mark Antony. Keen to avoid war, Octavian had his sister Octavia married to Antony, but even that could not keep him away from his dangerous mistress. Mysterious and seductive, Antony had fallen completely under the charm of Cleopatra of Egypt, just as Caesar had done before him. Knowing full well of the rift it would cause, Antony moved to Egypt to live with his lover, abandoning his wife and with it the allegiance of the Roman public.

As Antony spent his days with the pharaoh and the children she had borne him, his reputation in Rome was crumbling. Convinced Antony vied to be the sole ruler of Rome, Octavian and his propagandists ran a smear campaign against his name, claiming he had broken Roman law by marrying the foreign woman. Antony was not helped by his own military disaster in the Parthian War, where his Roman forces were crushed by the Parthians. But it was his quest to elevate Caesarion, Cleopatra and Caesar's son, as the true heir of Caesar with the title 'King of kings' that was the last straw for Octavian. The named heir of Caesar declared war against Cleopatra and with her, the disgraced Mark Antony.

Although a host of Octavian's enemies hurried to Antony's side, Caesar's adopted son enlisted the aid of his close friend and brilliant general Agrippa. Under Agrippa's command, Octavian enjoyed a host of early successes and managed to disrupt Antony's supply lines in the Gulf of Ambracia near Actium. Suffering from a lack of supplies and the pressure of a queen eager to return to Egypt, Antony began to plan for battle and finally emerged from Actium harbour on 2 September 31 BCE.

What proceeded was an equally matched battle at sea where neither side was able to grasp an advantage. As the two forces clashed, Cleopatra made a sudden about turn and commanded her forces to retreat and return to Egypt. Confused and panicked, Antony followed his lover and doomed the remainder of his fleet.

It was a year after this devastating defeat when Octavian's forces finally crushed Antony's in Alexandria. After receiving news that Cleopatra was dead, Antony fell upon his own sword. Cleopatra was very much alive, though, and she tried to appeal to Octavian, but her seductress' powers finally failed her. Faced with being paraded through the streets as Octavian's captive, she took her own life. Octavian executed Caesarion and established himself as the first Roman emperor, taking on the name Augustus. Augustus would come to rule a developing, peaceful and prosperous Roman Empire until his death in 14 CE, then aged 75. The long and glorious age of Roman emperors had begun with a sea battle at Actium.

Octavian

GALLEYS 250

INFANTRY 16,000

ARCHERS 3,000

OCTAVIAN

LEADER

Julius Caesar's adopted son and heir, Octavian became known as Augustus after founding the Roman Empire as the first emperor.

Strength Wise enough to give military command to Marcus Agrippa.

Weakness An average general with wavering public support.

LIBURNIAN FLEET

KEY UNIT

A type of light galley that allowed the crew to rain down arrows and stones on their enemy.

Strength Easy to manoeuvre and take advantage of any mistakes.

Weakness Lack of strength makes it vulnerable to ramming attacks from larger ships.

PLUMBATA

KEY WEAPON

Heavy and sharp lead-weighted darts crafted from iron with double the range of a full-sized arrow.

Strength The extended range makes it capable of wounding and even killing men from a great distance.

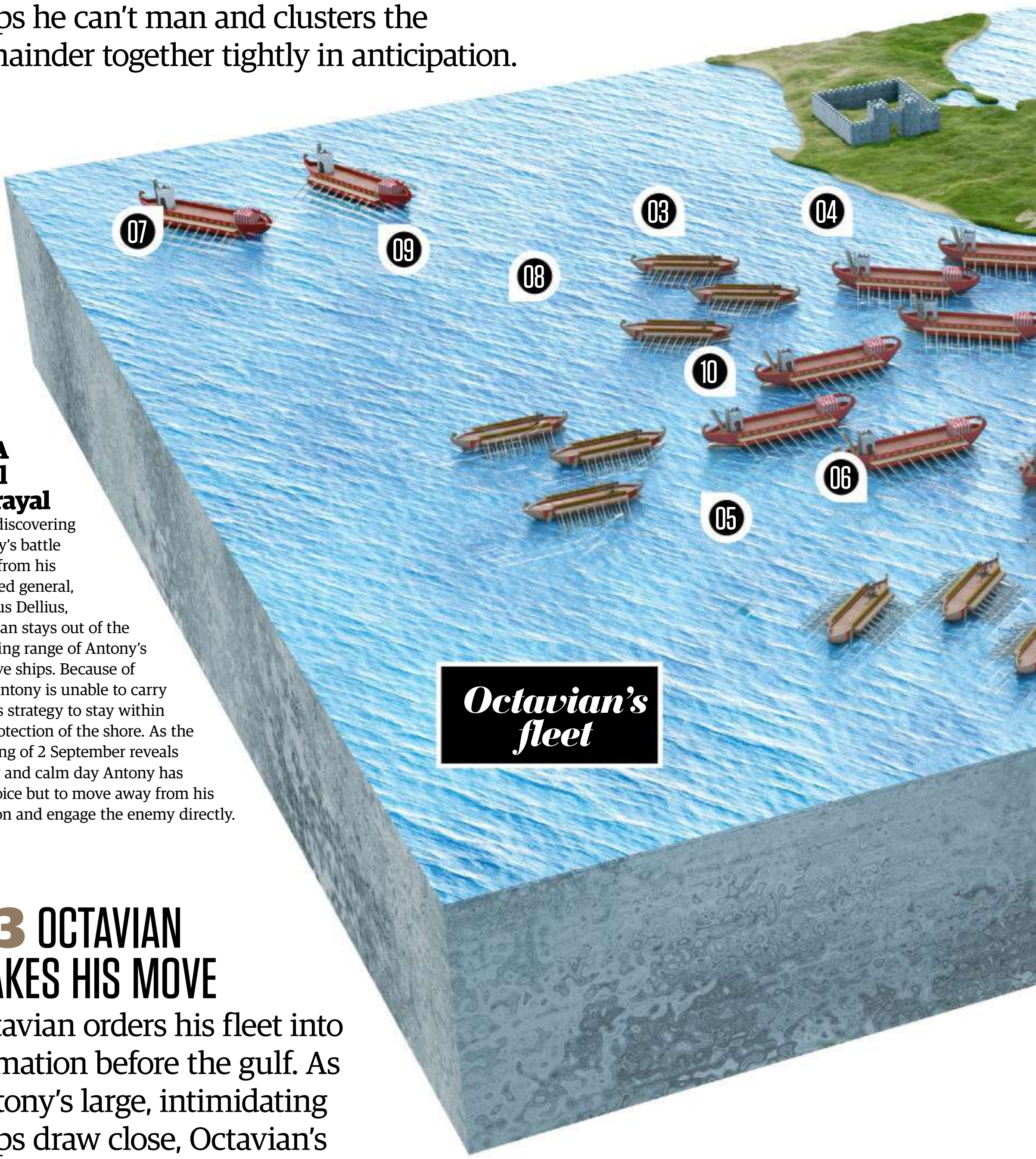
Weakness The plumbata requires a great amount of skill and training to fire successfully.

01 A BAD START

In a cruel twist of fate, Antony's forces suffer from a vicious malaria outbreak while they wait for Octavian's fleet. As a result, many of his massive ships are undermanned. Antony sets fire to the ships he can't man and clusters the remainder together tightly in anticipation.

10 The final few

Not all of Antony's ships follow him in retreat, but losing so many ships in a single blow dooms the remaining vessels. They fight long into the night, but the calm weather quickly turns foul and a violent gale batters the galleys. Unable to fight any longer, Antony's remaining fleet surrenders and most of the 300 ships taken by Octavian meet a fiery end.



02 A fatal betrayal

After discovering Antony's battle plans from his defected general, Quintus Dellius, Octavian stays out of the ramming range of Antony's massive ships. Because of this, Antony is unable to carry out his strategy to stay within the protection of the shore. As the morning of 2 September reveals a clear and calm day Antony has no choice but to move away from his position and engage the enemy directly.

03 OCTAVIAN MAKES HIS MOVE

Octavian orders his fleet into formation before the gulf. As Antony's large, intimidating ships draw close, Octavian's famed general Agrippa suddenly extends his left wing in an effort to row around Antony's advancing right flank.

04 The forces meet

Lucius Policola, leading Antony's right wing, moves outward to meet Agrippa's advancing forces. As a result his formation detaches from Antony's centre and a gap is formed. Antony's troops are inexperienced and this manoeuvre throws the entire centre fleet into confusion.

09 The beaten commander

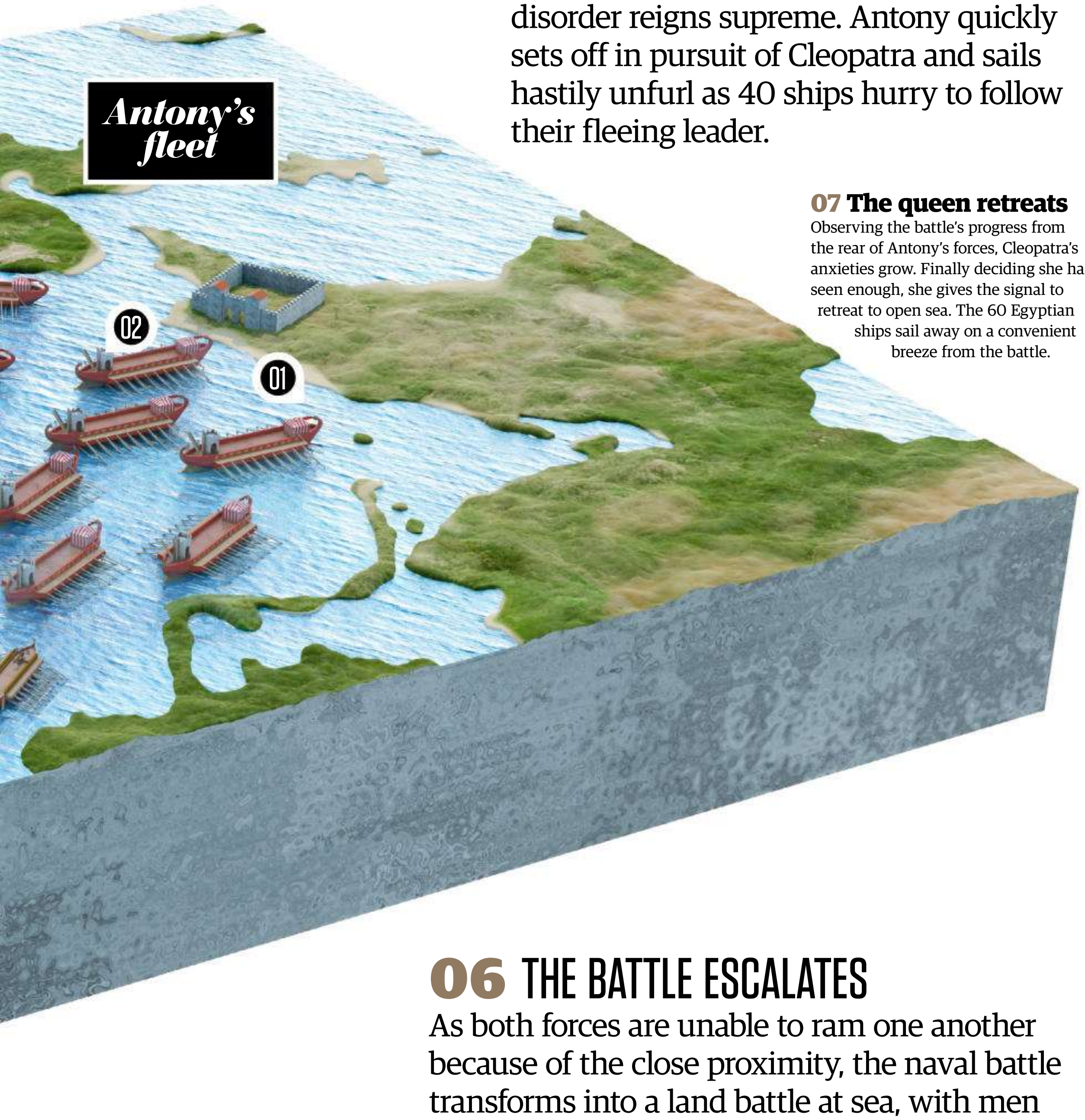
Clear of any danger, the heavy wooden towers are thrown from Antony's ships and he is finally able to catch up with Cleopatra's fleeing ships. Cleopatra allows him to board her royal galley but Antony cannot bring himself to face his lover. He walks to the bow of the ship and holds his head in his hands for many hours, unable to utter a word to anyone.

08 ANTONY FLEES

Having missed Cleopatra's signal, Antony watches from his ship, stunned by his lover's abrupt departure. The panic and confusion spreads quickly to his lines and disorder reigns supreme. Antony quickly sets off in pursuit of Cleopatra and sails hastily unfurl as 40 ships hurry to follow their fleeing leader.

07 The queen retreats

Observing the battle's progress from the rear of Antony's forces, Cleopatra's anxieties grow. Finally deciding she has seen enough, she gives the signal to retreat to open sea. The 60 Egyptian ships sail away on a convenient breeze from the battle.



06 THE BATTLE ESCALATES

As both forces are unable to ram one another because of the close proximity, the naval battle transforms into a land battle at sea, with men equipped with shields, spears and arrows attempting to board their opponent's ships. The two sides attack and retreat over many hours, with no advantage falling to either, and heavy fatigue descends over both sides. From Antony's decks burning missiles cascade down and cover the ships in a blanket of thick black smoke.

05 Battle of the centres

With Antony's centre exposed and in disarray, Lucius Arruntius, who commands Octavian's centre, sends his ships forward at full speed, straight into the enemy centre. A major battle erupts.

Mark Antony

GALLEYS	290
INFANTRY	20,000
ARCHERS	2,000

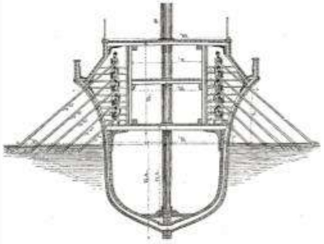
MARK ANTONY

LEADER

Famed politician and general, his affair with Cleopatra strained his relationship with Rome.

Strength A vast fleet and strong support from the powerful Roman consuls in the Senate.

Weakness Distracted by his relationship with his lover Cleopatra.



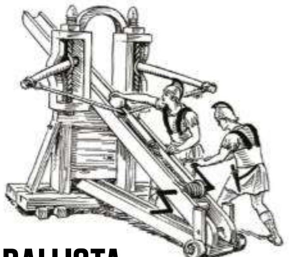
QUINQUEREME FLEET

KEY UNIT

Gigantic, intimidating galleys that featured huge rams and could be very heavy.

Strength Armoured bronze plates ideal for ramming.

Weakness Slow and hard to manoeuvre, small failures could prove disastrous.



BALLISTA

KEY WEAPON

Huge towers built onto the decks of ships, which catapulted missiles at the enemy.

Strengths Shot with massive force, devastating if on target.

Weakness A miss caused massive delays and left the men on board extremely vulnerable.

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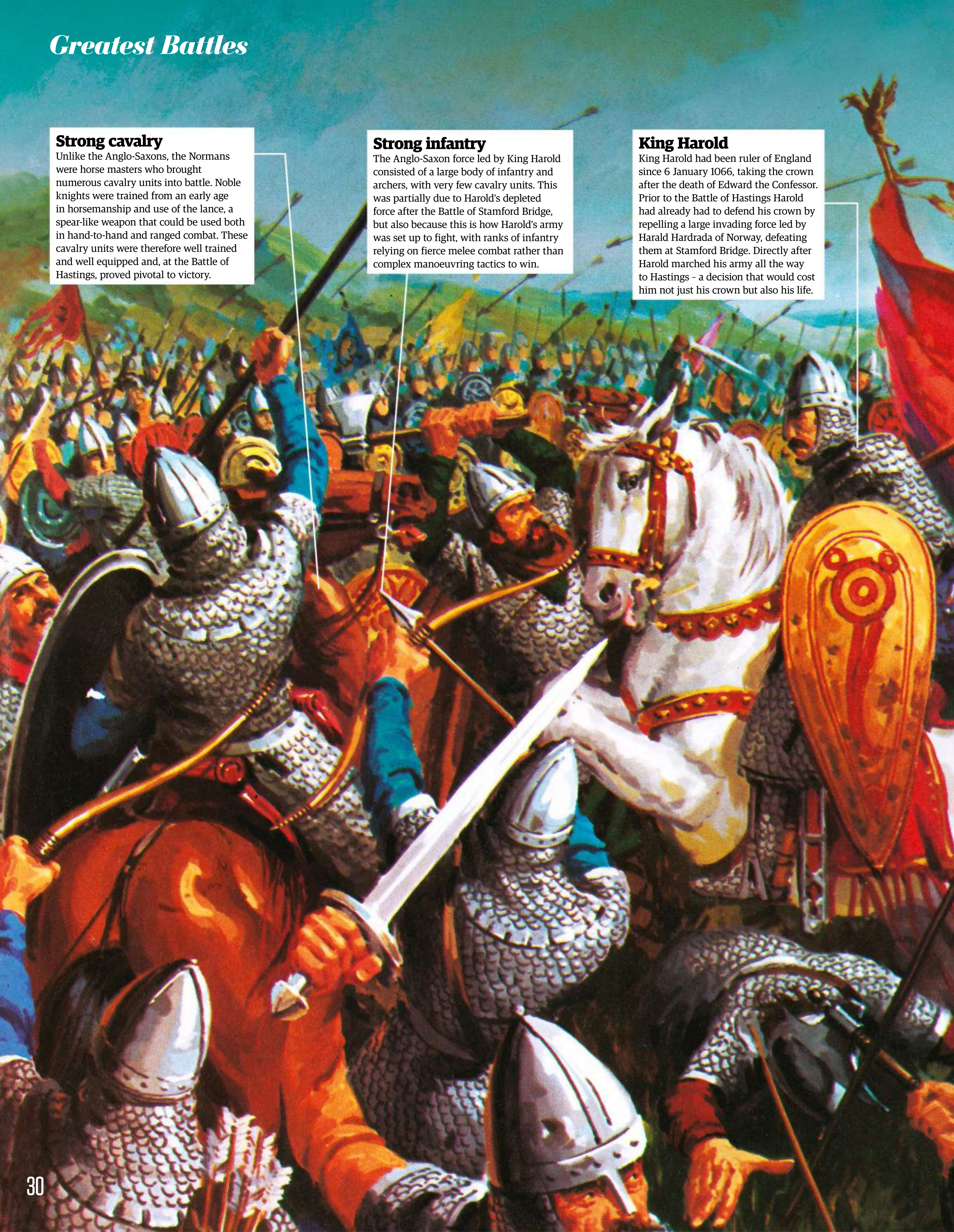


Strong cavalry

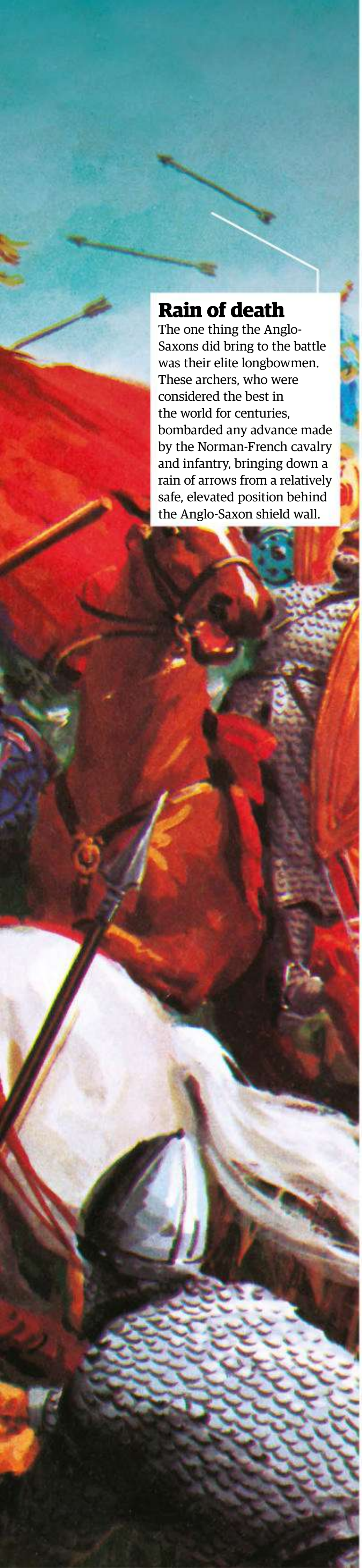
Unlike the Anglo-Saxons, the Normans were horse masters who brought numerous cavalry units into battle. Noble knights were trained from an early age in horsemanship and use of the lance, a spear-like weapon that could be used both in hand-to-hand and ranged combat. These cavalry units were therefore well trained and well equipped and, at the Battle of Hastings, proved pivotal to victory.

Strong infantry

The Anglo-Saxon force led by King Harold consisted of a large body of infantry and archers, with very few cavalry units. This was partially due to Harold's depleted force after the Battle of Stamford Bridge, but also because this is how Harold's army was set up to fight, with ranks of infantry relying on fierce melee combat rather than complex manoeuvring tactics to win.

King Harold

King Harold had been ruler of England since 6 January 1066, taking the crown after the death of Edward the Confessor. Prior to the Battle of Hastings Harold had already had to defend his crown by repelling a large invading force led by Harald Hardrada of Norway, defeating them at Stamford Bridge. Directly after Harold marched his army all the way to Hastings – a decision that would cost him not just his crown but also his life.



Rain of death
The one thing the Anglo-Saxons did bring to the battle was their elite longbowmen. These archers, who were considered the best in the world for centuries, bombarded any advance made by the Norman-French cavalry and infantry, bringing down a rain of arrows from a relatively safe, elevated position behind the Anglo-Saxon shield wall.

BATTLE OF HASTINGS

HASTINGS, ENGLAND 14 OCTOBER 1066

One of the most influential conflicts in British history, the Battle of Hastings was a cataclysmic culmination of a war of succession, with three potential heirs to the English throne duking it out for control of the island nation. At the start of the war there were three competing for the throne, which Edward the Confessor had held till his death. These were Edward's cousin, Duke William of Normandy; Harold Godwinson, the most powerful man in England; and the Norwegian Harald Hardrada, who was king of Norway and distantly related. These three rivals were soon reduced to two however, with Harold Godwinson defeating Harald Hardrada at the Battle of Stamford Bridge in Yorkshire, England, on 25 September 1066.

This defeat left just Duke William of Normandy and Harold Godwinson to battle it out for the title of king; in fact, Godwinson took the title prematurely after Stamford Bridge, believing that Edward had promised him the throne before his death, despite his closer familial relation to William. This angered the French duke immensely and, after gaining support from the Vatican, he assembled a vast army consisting of men from Normandy, Flanders, Brittany and France (ie Paris).

Just days after the Battle of Stamford Bridge, William set sail for England and, landing on the south coast, began moving towards London. Harold soon got wind of the invasion and, reassembling his remaining army, marched south at great speed to intercept William. The two armies met on Senlac Hill about ten kilometres (six miles) north-west of the town of Hastings in Sussex.

Harold approached the battle three weeks after the Battle of Stamford Bridge with a depleted and tired force (they had marched all the way back from Yorkshire), while in contrast the Norman-French forces were fresh and greater in number. As can be seen in the detailed battlemap and run-through of the key events overleaf, it was an incredibly bloody affair and one in which we all know William came out on top, subsequently taking the English throne.

Many reasons have been put forward by military historians for Harold's defeat, but most agree on three pivotal points. Firstly, he was too keen to engage the threat of William, marching an exhausted army all the way from northern England at great speed to fight. Secondly, despite stopping by in London en route to face William, he failed to appreciate the city's defensive capabilities and didn't hole up there – a move that would have swung the odds much more in his favour. And finally, after taking up an advantageous position on the battlefield (atop Senlac Hill) he failed to maintain discipline within his troops, which meant the lines were broken easily by a little deception.

Unlike the results of many other succession wars, this outcome radically altered the way England developed. Once William had succeeded Harold, the Norman Conquest of the country began proper – a process that would see the vast majority of the ruling classes displaced as well as a complete overhaul of the country's administrative structure – the *Domesday Book* is great evidence of this.

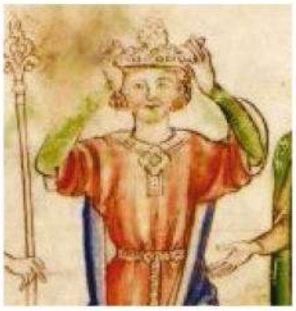
The Anglo-Saxon language was also phased out in favour of French, trading and diplomatic ties with mainland Europe strengthened, new stone castles, cathedrals and civic buildings were built all over the country and England became a new financial powerhouse in Europe. Indeed, modern England – and Britain in general – was hugely shaped by the Norman takeover.

Anglo-Saxon

TROOPS 7,000

CAVALRY UNKNOWN

CANNONS 0



KING HAROLD II

LEADER

Prior to becoming king of England, Harold was a powerful nobleman and earl of several counties including East Anglia and Wessex. He accrued power through a number of successful military campaigns.
Strengths A battle-hardened warrior-king with a strong army and plenty of combat experience.
Weaknesses Overly confident after Stamford Bridge; few tactics.

LONGBOWMEN

IMPORTANT UNIT

Excellent shots and fast on their feet, longbowmen specialised in bombarding enemies with arrows.
Strengths The most well-trained and accurate archers in the world.
Weakness Like all archers, they are fairly vulnerable up close in hand-to-hand fighting.

LONGBOW

KEY WEAPON

A fearsome weapon that took out many Norman soldiers early on. It was the sniper rifle of its day.
Strengths Amazing range and stopping power compared to standard bows.
Weaknesses Required great upper body strength and lots of practice.

01 Senlac Hill

The battle commenced with King Harold arranging his army on Senlac Hill, an elevated position close to Hastings. A mix of infantry and archers was laid out with the foot soldiers forming a vast, defensive shield wall from which Harold intended to repel any Norman-French advance.

02 OPENING BARRAGE

William laid out his forces a little way from the hill and ordered his archers to fire. His lower elevation and the size of the Anglo-Saxon shield wall meant little damage was caused.

03 The wall holds

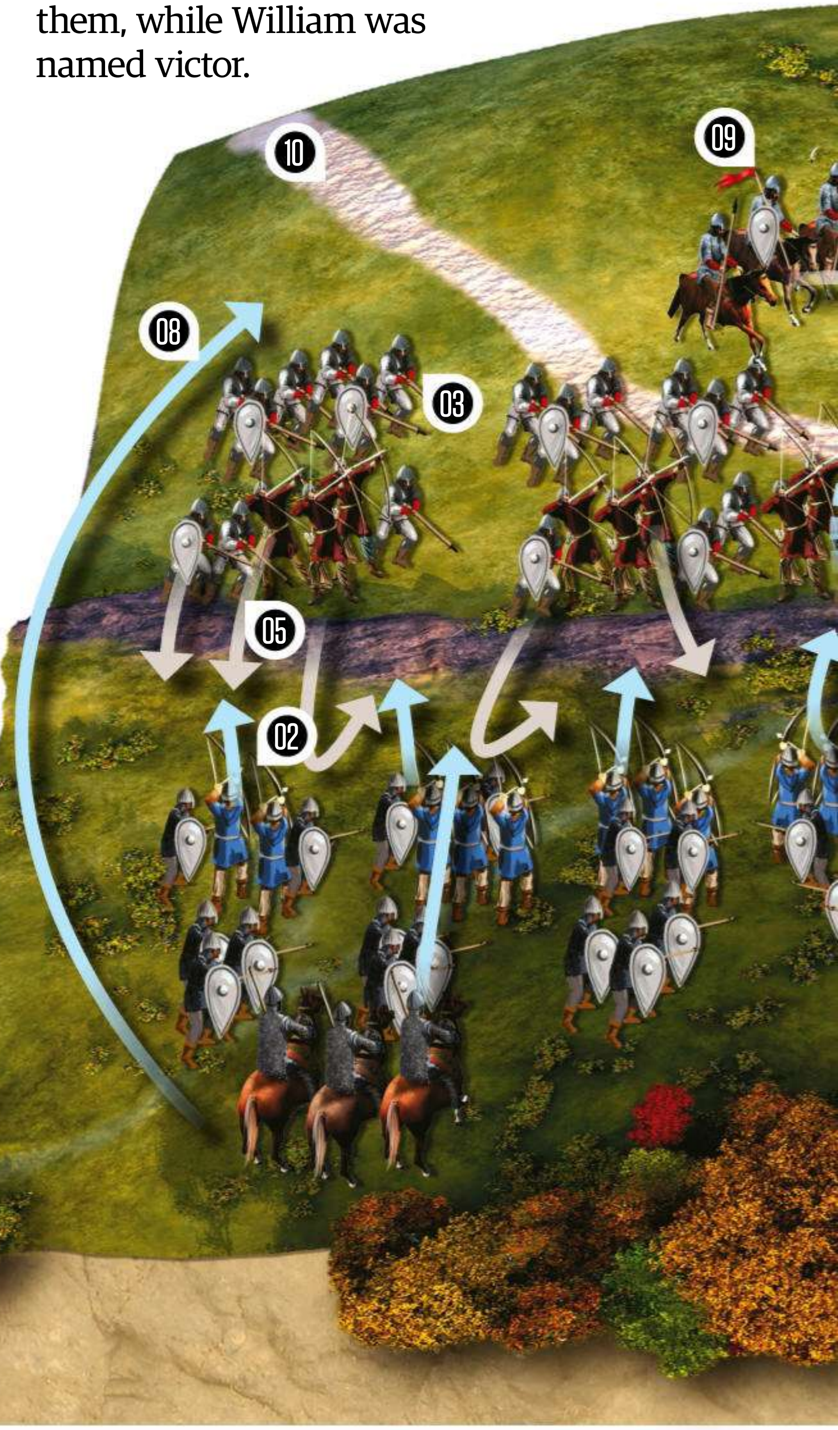
After witnessing the ineffectiveness of his archers, William ordered his archers to rejoin his infantry units and charge the enemy as one force. As the Norman infantry approached the hill, English archers unleashed many volleys to great effect. When they reached the shield wall, fierce hand-to-hand combat ensued.

04 William not dead

With the Norman-French infantry now engaged with the Anglo-Saxons, William ordered some of his cavalry units to bolster them from the rear, but after over an hour of fighting the shield wall remained intact. Disastrously for William, the left flank of his forces was broken by the Anglo-Saxons. At the same time, a rumour spread that William had been killed. To quash this the Duke removed his helmet and raced across the battlefield to intercept the Anglo-Saxons.

10 ANGLO-SAXONS FLEE

The news quickly travels that Harold has been killed and the Anglo-Saxon army began to disintegrate. William's forces pursued them, while William was named victor.



05 CUT OFF

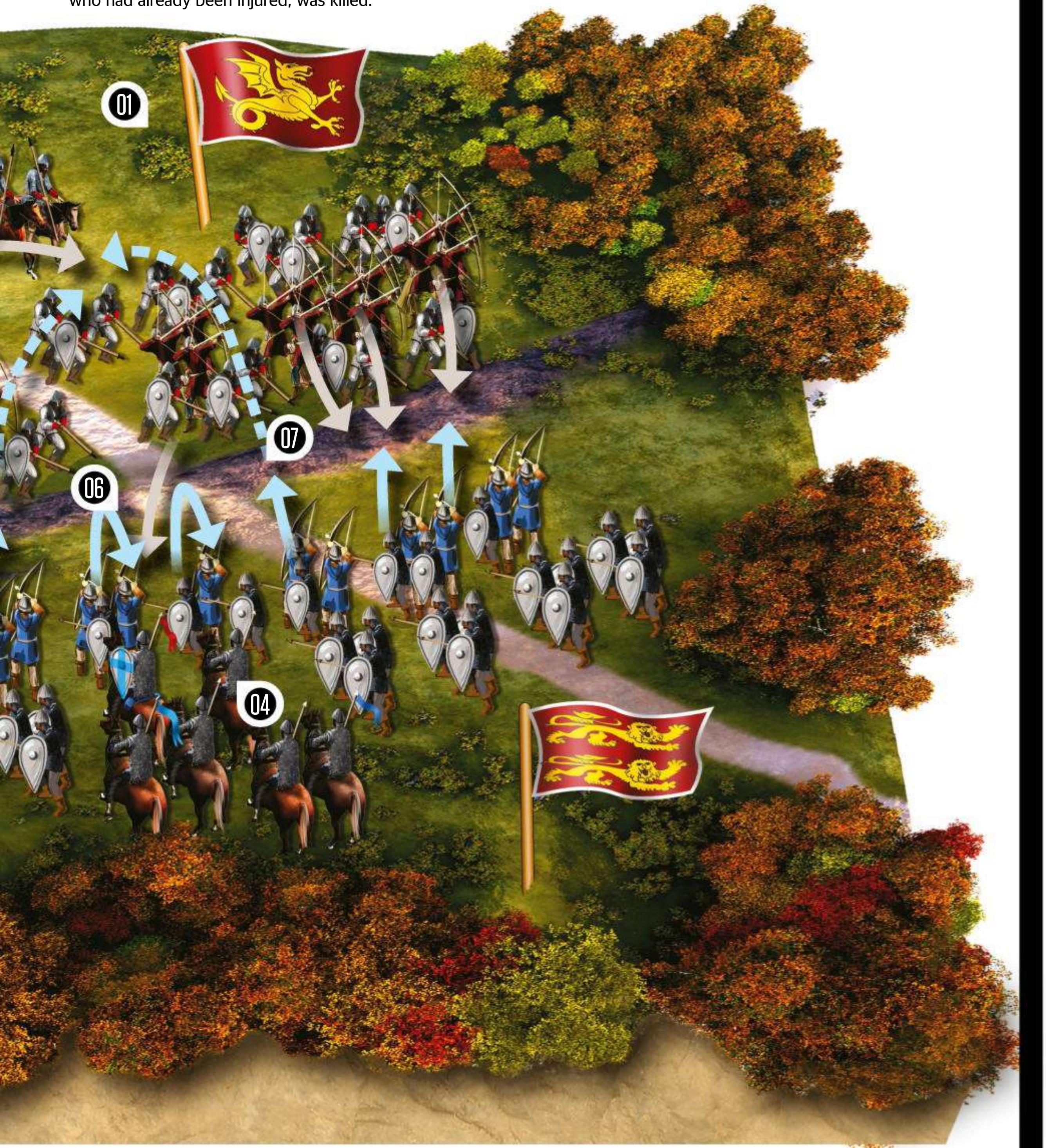
Believing to have critically broken the Norman-French line, the group of Anglo-Saxon infantry that broke the Norman-French left flank pursued the retreating men down the hill. While they killed more men, they left themselves exposed and cut off – a fatal mistake.

06 Feigned flight

Around 1pm, the Anglo-Saxon shield wall still held. William ordered his forces to retreat and regroup. After a brief hiatus William decided to switch tactics, employing his cavalry to initiate a series of feigned flight assaults.

09 King Harold killed

William's play was a success and in the early evening the Anglo-Saxon shield wall finally broke. A period of intense, desperate fighting began on the hill, with many troops falling on both sides. There was little to no positional discipline now. Around 6pm Harold's personal standard was attacked and the English king, who had already been injured, was killed.



07 Shield wall breaks

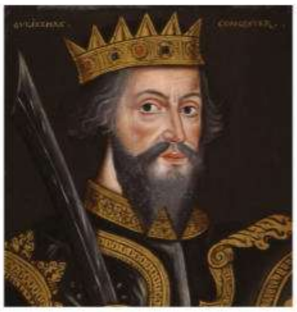
The tactic worked, drawing Anglo-Saxons out of the shield wall and down the hill. This forced the wall to contract, reducing its width and finally exposed Harold and his few elite cavalry units. The portion of the Anglo-Saxon shield wall that had pursued the Norman-French cavalry was surrounded and killed.

08 HAROLD'S INFANTRY OUTFLANKED

The contracting shield wall made outflanking Harold easier. William instructed his remaining cavalry to attack the wall on both sides.

Norman-French

TROOPS 10,000
CAVALRY UNKNOWN
CANNONS 0



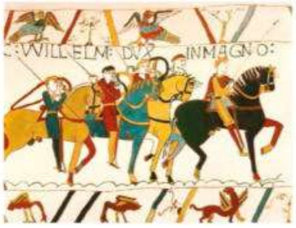
DUKE WILLIAM II

LEADER

A physically strong leader who was well known for his excellent riding skills, Duke William was a solid all-round leader. His ability to alter his tactics on the fly and improvise when things were not going his way was crucial to this huge victory.

Strengths A physically impressive leader with excellent horsemanship.

Weakness Relatively inexperienced when it came to battle.



CAVALRY

IMPORTANT UNIT

Fast, agile and – in the Normans' case – incredibly well trained, the cavalry arguably won this battle.

Strengths A unit with excellent manoeuvrability and speed.

Weakness Vulnerable to spear/pike-wielding infantry as well as flanking archer fire.

LONGSPEAR

KEY WEAPON

An ancient weapon that was great for melee combat as well as short-ranged potential via throwing.

Strengths A versatile weapon that can be used in both hand-to-hand combat or as a missile.

Weakness Required years of training to use effectively.

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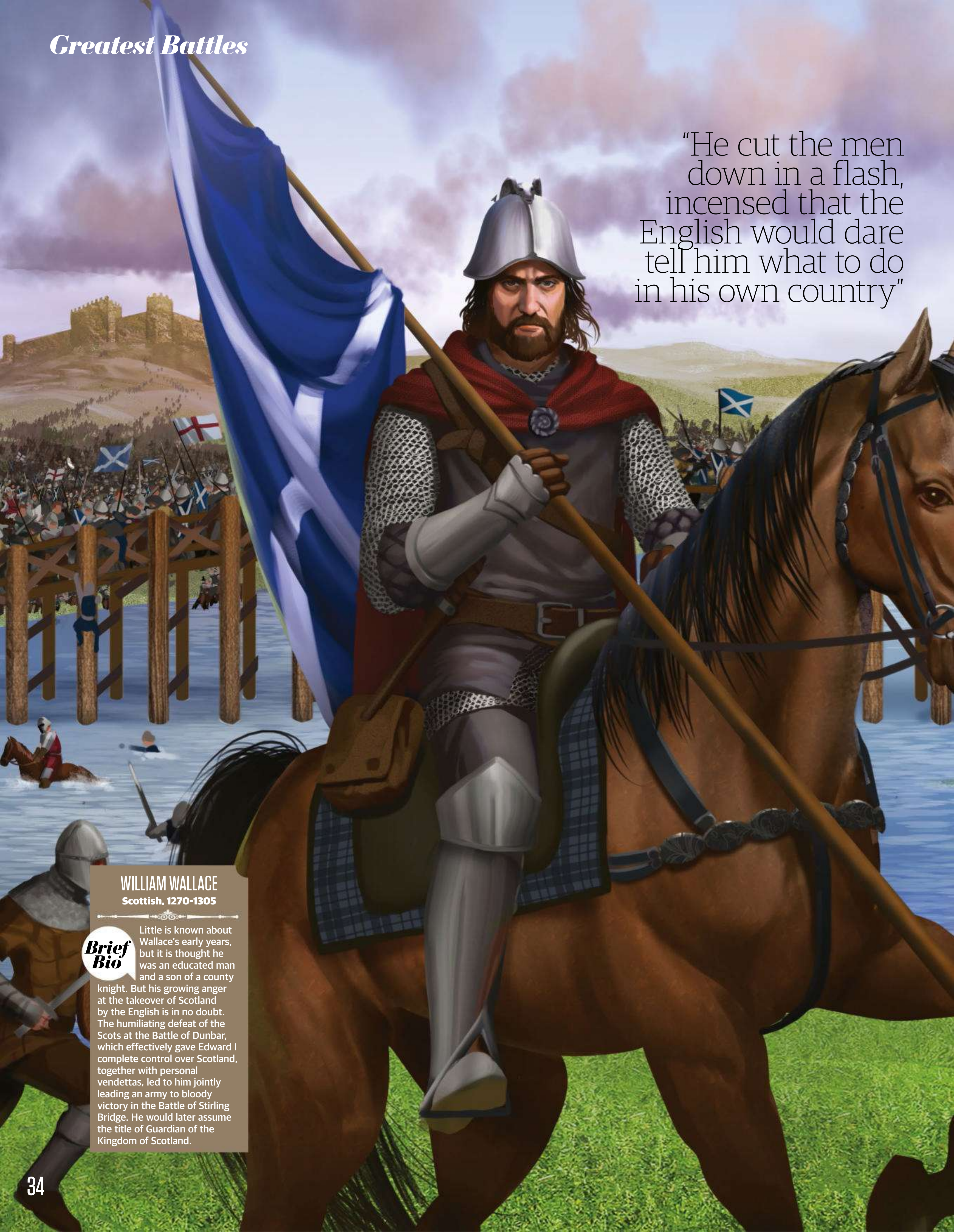


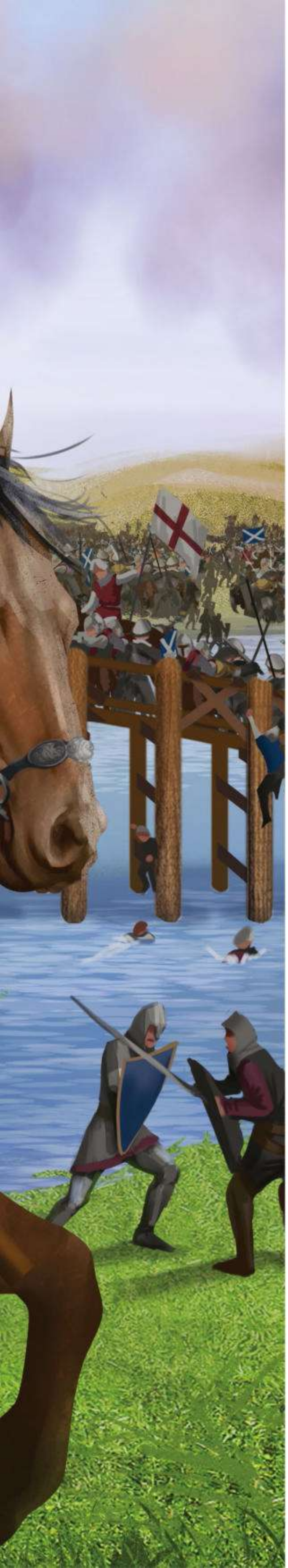
> "He cut the men down in a flash, incensed that the English would dare tell him what to do in his own country"

WILLIAM WALLACE

Scottish, 1270-1305

Brief Bio

Little is known about Wallace's early years, but it is thought he was an educated man and a son of a county knight. But his growing anger at the takeover of Scotland by the English is in no doubt. The humiliating defeat of the Scots at the Battle of Dunbar, which effectively gave Edward I complete control over Scotland, together with personal vendettas, led to him jointly leading an army to bloody victory in the Battle of Stirling Bridge. He would later assume the title of Guardian of the Kingdom of Scotland.



BATTLE OF STIRLING BRIDGE

STIRLING, SCOTLAND 11 SEPTEMBER 1297

William Wallace strode confidently among his troops. Thousands of men were lined up on high ground close to the Augustinian monastery of Cambuskenneth Abbey near Stirling. They stood still, looking down at the English army that had gathered not a mile away, studying them carefully. Every so often there would be a rousing cheer and a defiant chant. Wallace would give them sparks of energy, explain what he expected of them and get them excited. This would be their moment of glory, he told them. This was a chance to help bring Scotland back into the hands of the Scots.

It was just before dawn on 11 September 1297. Despite a slight breeze and a morning chill, things were about to warm up considerably. Only a few days earlier the Scottish force had been laying siege to Dundee Castle, which the English held thanks to their victory at Dunbar the previous year. However, when news reached Wallace that the English army was heading to Scotland on the order of English King Edward I, Wallace called off the siege and led his men south where they were to meet their oldest and fiercest enemy.

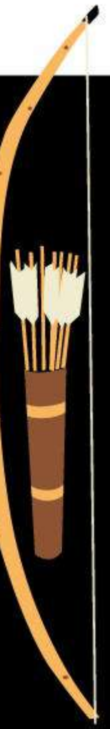
The English didn't have the element of surprise, but they looked impressive enough. Wallace watched them as they gathered south of the river, noting the many English banners fluttering in the breeze. The knights were sitting on the backs of large warhorses in their full regalia. His own troops were mostly infantry armed with long spears and they looked decidedly less professional. On paper, the English were the stronger side. Led by John de Warenne, Earl of Surrey, and Hugh de Cressingham, the English treasurer of Scotland, they were well versed in battle, a fighting machine that had recently crushed the Welsh in battle.

The Scots were far less experienced, raised on the basis of Scottish service and effectively men from the horseless classes forming a common army. The English thought them to be of lesser class, disorganised and weak, but they had one thing in spades: righteous anger. Handled well, Wallace believed they could win any battle and, as an experienced guerrilla campaigner, he hadn't come to face the English unprepared.

But who was William Wallace and how did he come to jointly command an army against the English? Some of our knowledge of the man comes from the writings of a storyteller called Blind Harry. He tells of a landowner's son who was educated, able to read and write in Latin and French and who was training to become a priest. Around the end of the 14th century, Walter Bower described Wallace as, "a tall man with the body of a giant, cheerful in appearance with agreeable features, broad-shouldered and big-boned […] pleasing in appearance but with a wild look, broad in the hips,

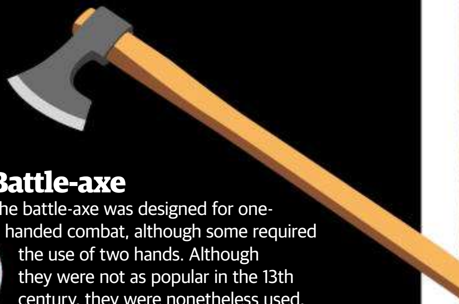
© Sara Biddle

Weapons used to inflict death and destruction



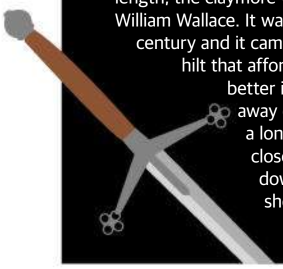
Bow and arrow

Although the Iron Age had made swords cheap, the bow was popular for its accuracy and range. The Welsh had proved themselves adept at using them but the user needed space to operate. As it proved at the Battle of Stirling Bridge, the cramped conditions north of the river and the aggressive nature of the Scots' attack gave little opportunity to use them, but they could be devastating when used.



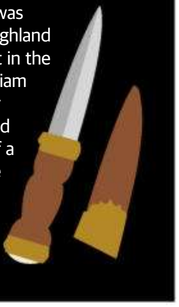
Battle-axe

The battle-axe was designed for one-handed combat, although some required the use of two hands. Although they were not as popular in the 13th century, they were nonetheless used. They would struggle to hack through steel-plate armour, but their weight and sharpness would make light work of most enemies. The Scots would also have had axes and indeed used them to great effect on the English troops they felled in Stirling.



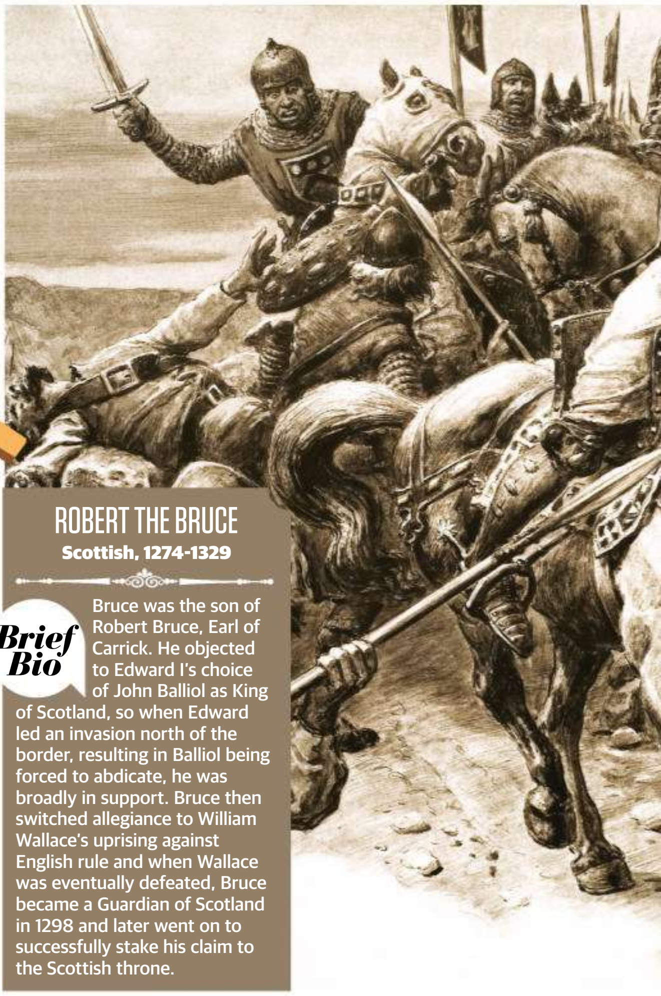
Claymore

Measuring up to 152 centimetres (60 inches) in length, the claymore was a sword favoured by William Wallace. It was first used in the 13th century and it came with a twisted wooden hilt that afforded a good grip. It was better if the enemy was further away due to its size, but it had a long ricasso so, if an enemy got close, the user could grip further down the sword and stab at shorter range.



Dirk

A long thrusting dagger, the dirk was used by officers in the Scottish Highland regiments and it was prominent in the 13th century. It is thought William Heselrig, the English sheriff or Lanark, was killed by a dirk and that Wallace killed the leader of a group of English youths using one when he was 19. The dirk would double up as a utility tool and it was worn on a Scotsman's kilt.

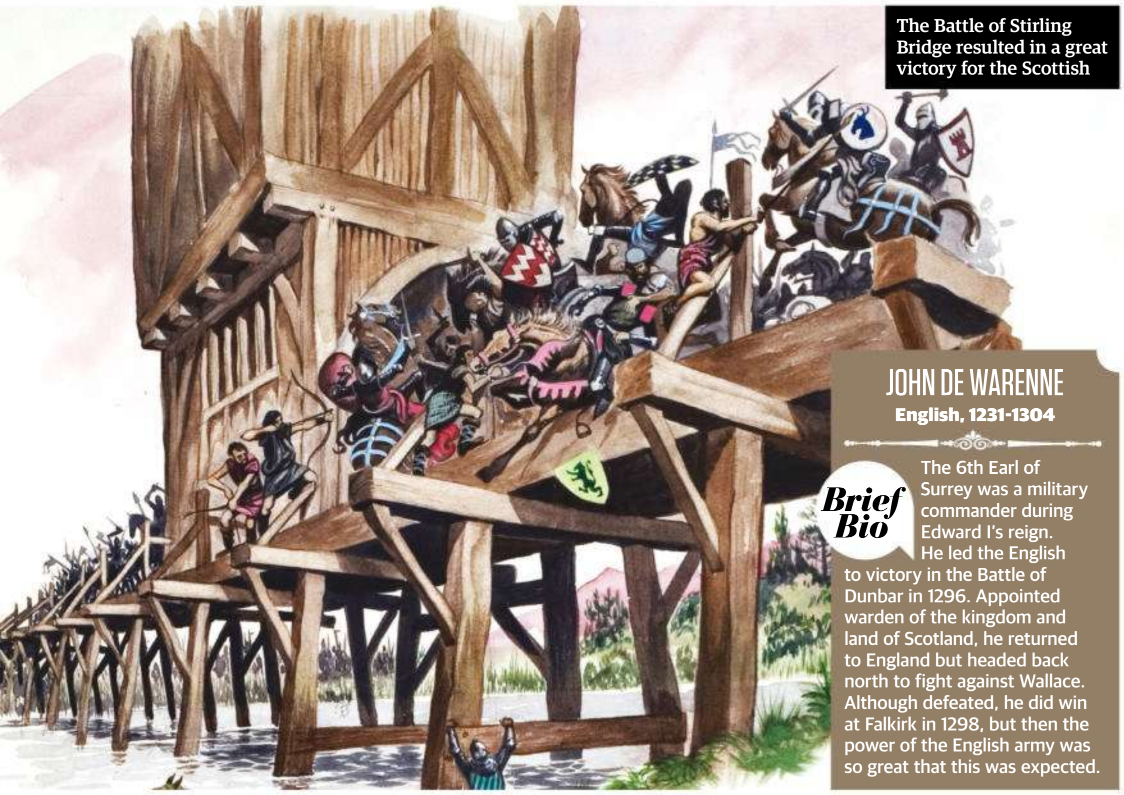


ROBERT THE BRUCE

Scottish, 1274-1329

Brief Bio

Bruce was the son of Robert Bruce, Earl of Carrick. He objected to Edward I's choice of John Balliol as King of Scotland, so when Edward led an invasion north of the border, resulting in Balliol being forced to abdicate, he was broadly in support. Bruce then switched allegiance to William Wallace's uprising against English rule and when Wallace was eventually defeated, Bruce became a Guardian of Scotland in 1298 and later went on to successfully stake his claim to the Scottish throne.



The Battle of Stirling Bridge resulted in a great victory for the Scottish

JOHN DE WARENNE

English, 1231-1304

Brief Bio

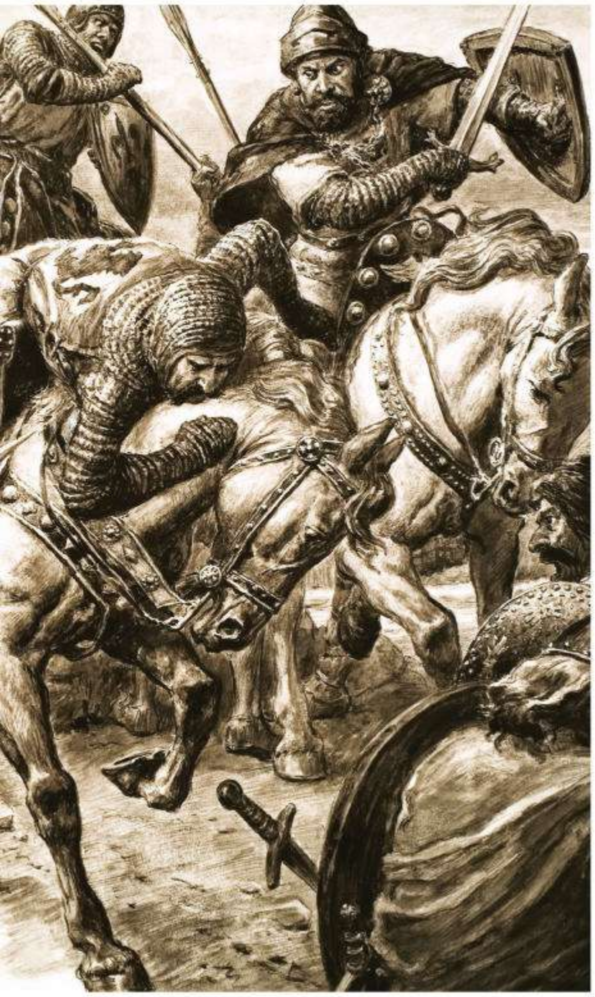
The 6th Earl of Surrey was a military commander during Edward I's reign. He led the English to victory in the Battle of Dunbar in 1296. Appointed warden of the kingdom and land of Scotland, he returned to England but headed back north to fight against Wallace. Although defeated, he did win at Falkirk in 1298, but then the power of the English army was so great that this was expected.

with strong arms and legs, a most spirited fighting-man, with all his limbs very strong and firm."

Sparked by the appointment of John Balliol as King of the Scots in 1292 on the choosing of King Edward I of England, Scotland had effectively come to be ruled by England, ending 100 years of relative peace between the two countries. Balliol had eventually attempted to rebel against this control, siding Scotland with France when Edward wanted to go to war with the French. Balliol made an unsuccessful attempt at attacking Cumberland that saw the English sack Berwick in retaliation. In the middle of all of this carnage, Wallace's anger was growing more and more intense.

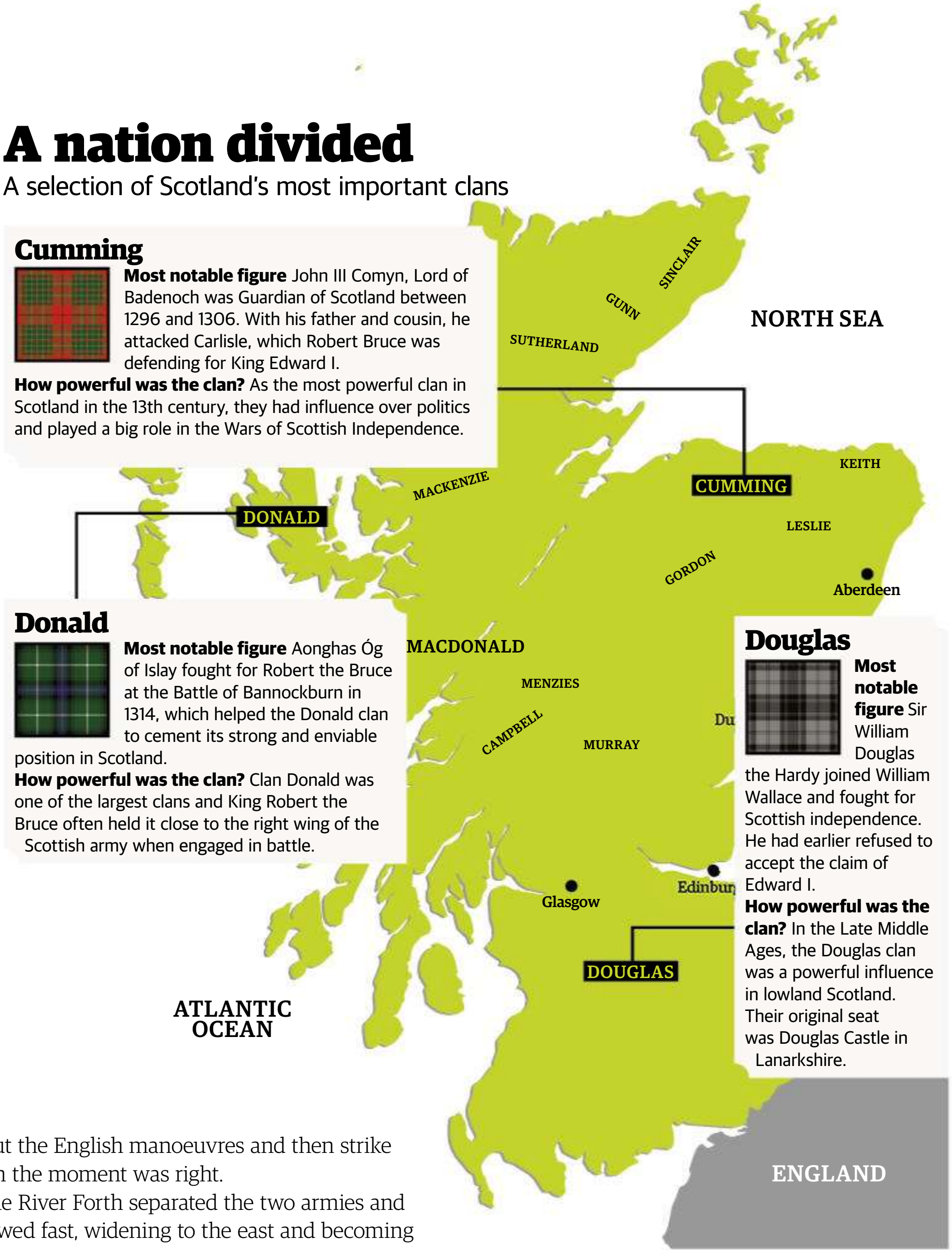
Legend has it that a flash point occurred when he was approached by a group of English soldiers demanding the fish he had caught from a local Scottish river. Wallace offered them half in an attempt at appeasement, but the soldiers refused the offer and the rage in this great bear of a man boiled over. He cut the men down in a flash, incensed that the English would dare tell him what to do in his own country.

The biggest turning point, though, and the one which had led to Wallace jointly leading an army with Andrew Moray, came in the summer of 1297. Wallace and his men were in Lanark



A nation divided

A selection of Scotland's most important clans



Cumming

Most notable figure John III Comyn, Lord of Badenoch was Guardian of Scotland between 1296 and 1306. With his father and cousin, he attacked Carlisle, which Robert Bruce was defending for King Edward I.

How powerful was the clan? As the most powerful clan in Scotland in the 13th century, they had influence over politics and played a big role in the Wars of Scottish Independence.

Donald

Most notable figure Aonghas Óg of Islay fought for Robert the Bruce at the Battle of Bannockburn in 1314, which helped the Donald clan to cement its strong and enviable position in Scotland.

How powerful was the clan? Clan Donald was one of the largest clans and King Robert the Bruce often held it close to the right wing of the Scottish army when engaged in battle.

Douglas

Most notable figure Sir William Douglas the Hardy joined William Wallace and fought for Scottish independence. He had earlier refused to accept the claim of Edward I.

How powerful was the clan? In the Late Middle Ages, the Douglas clan was a powerful influence in lowland Scotland. Their original seat was Douglas Castle in Lanarkshire.

and became involved in a skirmish with English soldiers. Although Wallace maimed one of them, they decided to flee. Some historians believe that when the English sheriff of Lanark William Heselrig found out, he sought revenge on Wallace's wife, Mirren Braidfute, ordering her to be raped and executed. Wallace is said to have visited Heselrig late at night and split his skull in half. By killing one of Scotland's most high-profile rulers, Wallace became viewed as a courageous man who wasn't afraid to fight.

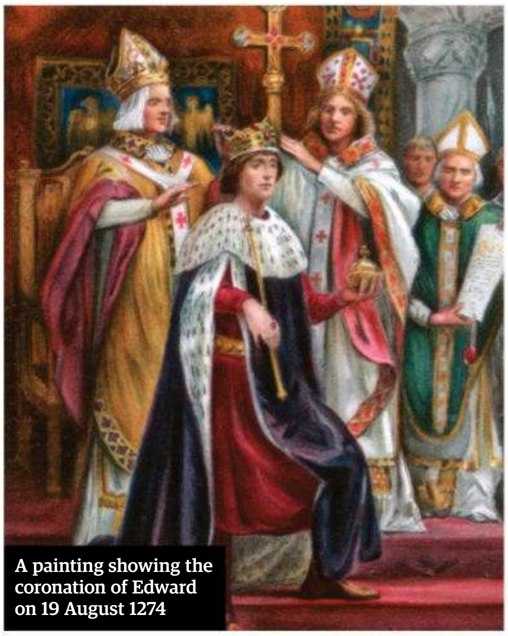
> "Wallace would not order his men to charge until an ideal number of the English had crossed"

These actions eventually led the son of a county knight to become the figurehead of a nation's battle for independence, waiting with his army on a hill in the cold Scottish autumn of 1297 for battle. Full of ambition and bristling with built-up hate, his forces were boosted when Andrew De Moray and his troops joined him. De Moray was an esquire who had led a rebellion against the English in the highlands and northeast Scotland. De Moray had captured a number of Scottish towns, including Elgin and Inverness, and together they formulated a plan. They would wait, patiently sit out the English manoeuvres and then strike when the moment was right.

The River Forth separated the two armies and it flowed fast, widening to the east and becoming very marshy to the west. If the English were going to make any headway in their battle against the Scots then they simply had to cross it. Swimming wasn't an option – it was far too dangerous a proposition given the equipment and armour the troops were carrying. The best way, the consensus suggested, was to use a narrow, wooden bridge close by.

The Earl of Surrey was not convinced. Stirling Bridge would only allow men to cross in small numbers and it was wide enough for just two horses walking side-by-side. Once they made it across this bridge they would then be in boggy conditions with the Scots on high ground.

Realising the situation wasn't favourable, Surrey agreed to mediate a truce and so sent Malcolm Earl of Lennox and his relative James Stewart. They came back empty-handed – Wallace believed the advantage was with the Scottish and he was there



A painting showing the coronation of Edward on 19 August 1274

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English

TROOPS	13,000
CAVALRY	750
LOSSES	6,000

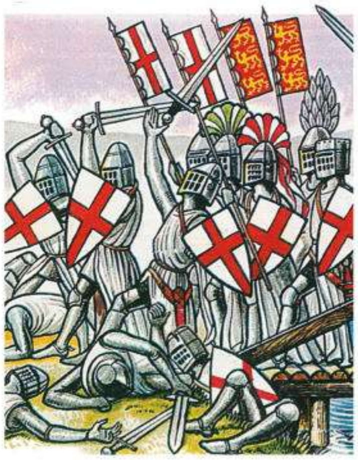
JOHN DE WARENNE

LEADER

The 6th Earl of Surrey had defeated the Scots a year earlier in the Battle of Dunbar and he was accompanied in leading the army by Hugh de Cressingham, treasurer of the English administration in Scotland.

Strengths Had fought in many battles, including Edward I's Welsh campaigns during which Wales was captured.

Weaknesses Known for switching sides, he wasn't the most loyal of men.



KNIGHTS

KEY UNIT

Sitting atop their warhorses in full regalia, the knights were well trained, experienced, ruthless and accustomed to winning.

Strengths Honour and chivalry was important to the knights, themselves professional heavy cavalry soldiers.

Weaknesses In the case of the Battle of Stirling Bridge, the horses made them cumbersome fighters and made crossing the bridge more difficult.

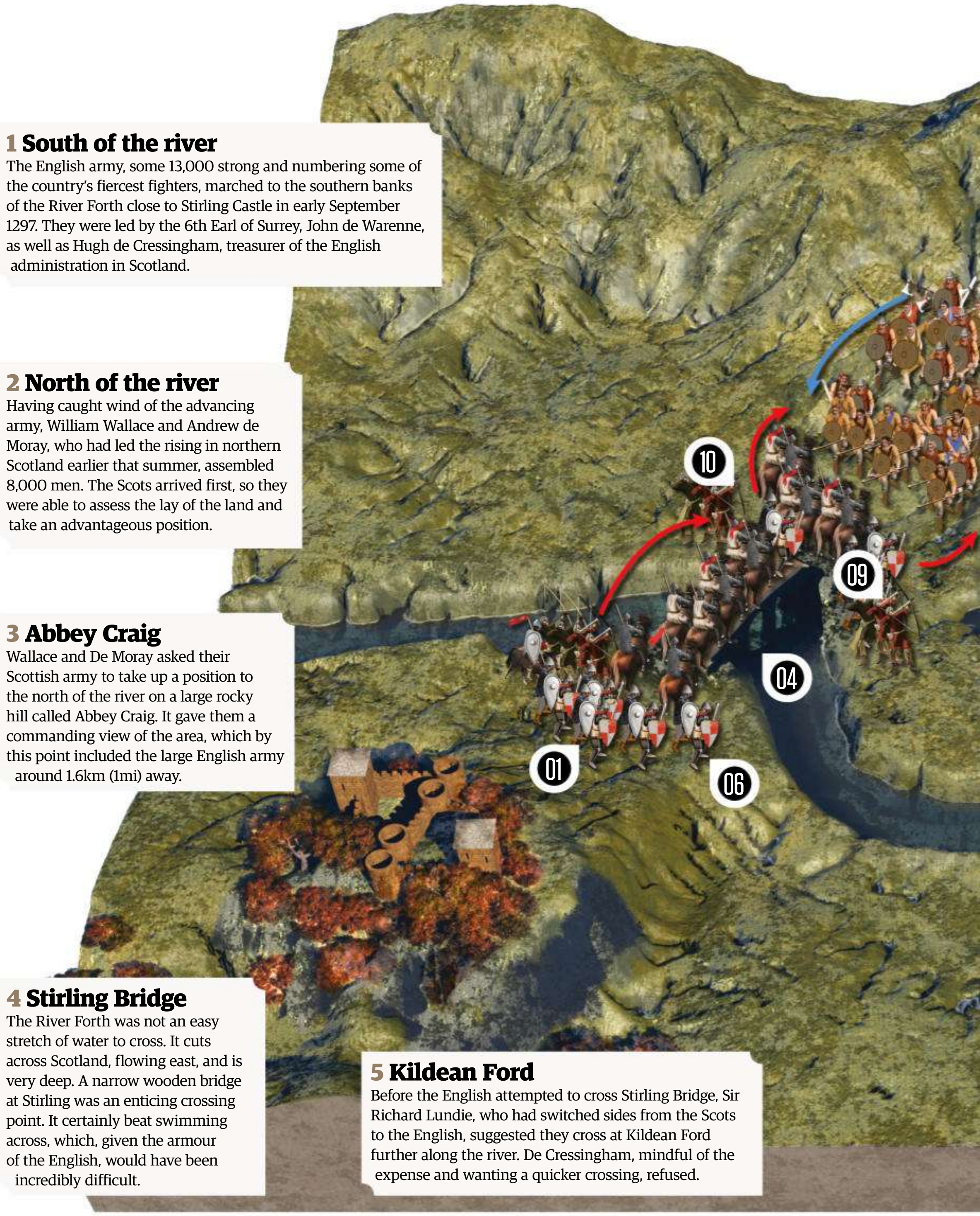
SWORD

KEY WEAPON

The Iron Age had made swords cheaper and changed the way they were made, but they were still a symbol of status and carried by the knights as a sign of their superiority over others.

Strengths Swords proved ideal for cutting, and to get through armour plating or leather, they also came in handy for thrusting.

Weaknesses They were more ideal for close-up fighting. The longbows of the Welsh bowmen were more effective for range.



1 South of the river
The English army, some 13,000 strong and numbering some of the country's fiercest fighters, marched to the southern banks of the River Forth close to Stirling Castle in early September 1297. They were led by the 6th Earl of Surrey, John de Warenne, as well as Hugh de Cressingham, treasurer of the English administration in Scotland.

2 North of the river
Having caught wind of the advancing army, William Wallace and Andrew de Moray, who had led the rising in northern Scotland earlier that summer, assembled 8,000 men. The Scots arrived first, so they were able to assess the lay of the land and take an advantageous position.

3 Abbey Craig
Wallace and De Moray asked their Scottish army to take up a position to the north of the river on a large rocky hill called Abbey Craig. It gave them a commanding view of the area, which by this point included the large English army around 1.6km (1mi) away.

4 Stirling Bridge
The River Forth was not an easy stretch of water to cross. It cuts across Scotland, flowing east, and is very deep. A narrow wooden bridge at Stirling was an enticing crossing point. It certainly beat swimming across, which, given the armour of the English, would have been incredibly difficult.

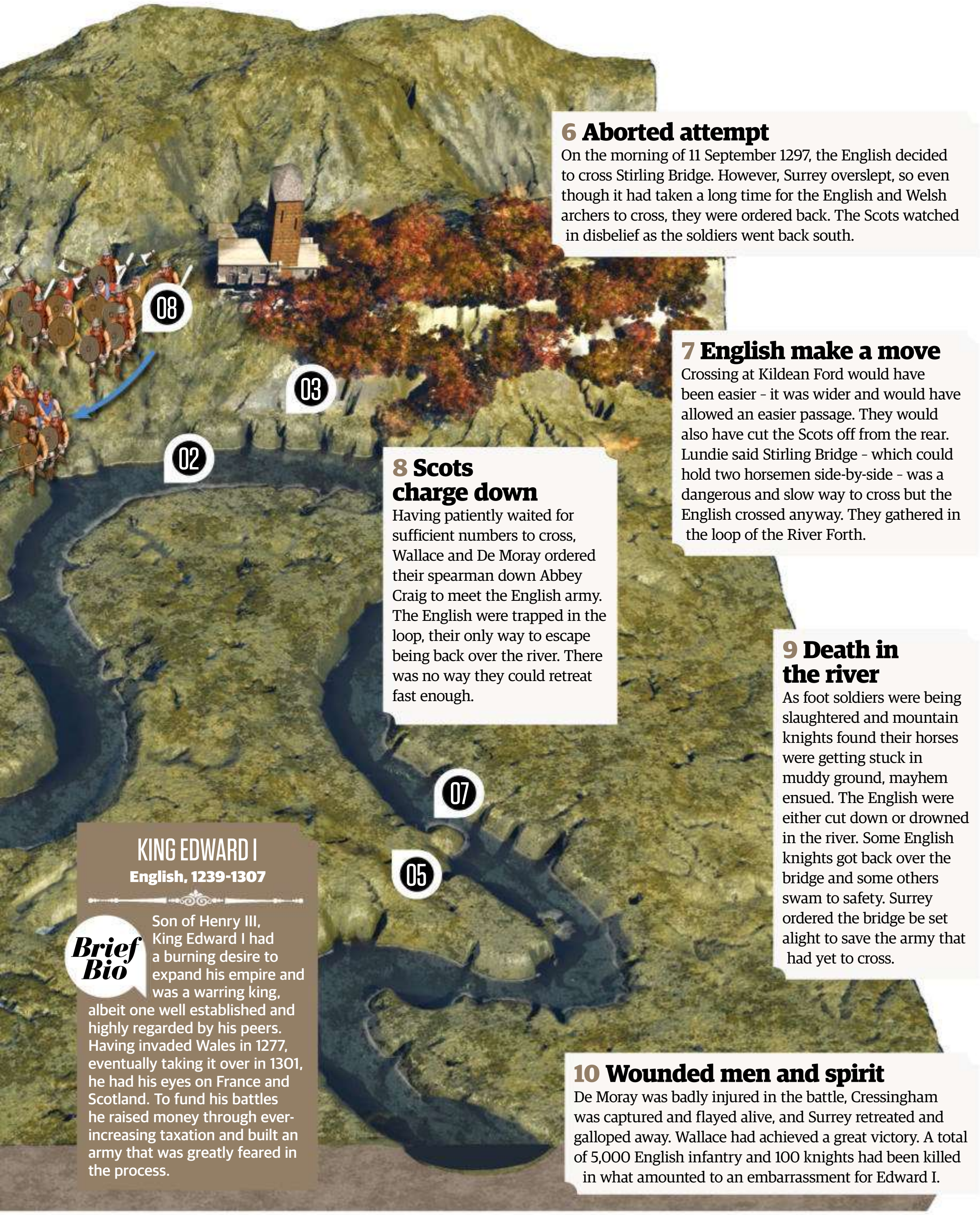
5 Kildean Ford
Before the English attempted to cross Stirling Bridge, Sir Richard Lundie, who had switched sides from the Scots to the English, suggested they cross at Kildean Ford further along the river. De Cressingham, mindful of the expense and wanting a quicker crossing, refused.

to fight, not talk. The situation for the English was far from ideal, but De Cressingham still argued they should push on and convinced Surrey. At the break of dawn on 11 September, the English and Welsh infantry began to cross the bridge. Wallace saw this and spoke to his troops again, ensuring they were ready for a brutal confrontation.

The Scottish troops would meet the English head-on through the middle. De Moray's soldiers would go down the flanks. For now, though, it was a game of patience – Wallace would not order his men to charge until an ideal number of the English had crossed.

While all this went on Surrey was – incredibly – sound asleep in his tent. By the time he finally awoke, hundreds of troops had made their way across. In farcical scenes, Wallace watched bemused as Surrey ordered the troops back over the bridge to the south of the river once more. It showed a dismissive attitude to the Scots – it meant Surrey cared little about the embarrassing, disorganised appearance this would display to the opposition. The English, his actions said, would win no matter what time he ordered his troops over.

As Wallace stood on high ground, able to see everything around him, he could see the trap that the English would be walking into and knew they were overconfident. Once they got over the river, they would have to gather on a confined narrow loop. The English soldiers would be naturally surrounded on three sides by water and the only possible ways out of that were either into the river,



6 Aborted attempt

On the morning of 11 September 1297, the English decided to cross Stirling Bridge. However, Surrey overslept, so even though it had taken a long time for the English and Welsh archers to cross, they were ordered back. The Scots watched in disbelief as the soldiers went back south.

7 English make a move

Crossing at Kildean Ford would have been easier – it was wider and would have allowed an easier passage. They would also have cut the Scots off from the rear. Lundie said Stirling Bridge – which could hold two horsemen side-by-side – was a dangerous and slow way to cross but the English crossed anyway. They gathered in the loop of the River Forth.

8 Scots charge down

Having patiently waited for sufficient numbers to cross, Wallace and De Moray ordered their spearman down Abbey Craig to meet the English army. The English were trapped in the loop, their only way to escape being back over the river. There was no way they could retreat fast enough.

9 Death in the river

As foot soldiers were being slaughtered and mountain knights found their horses were getting stuck in muddy ground, mayhem ensued. The English were either cut down or drowned in the river. Some English knights got back over the bridge and some others swam to safety. Surrey ordered the bridge be set alight to save the army that had yet to cross.

10 Wounded men and spirit

De Moray was badly injured in the battle, Cressingham was captured and flayed alive, and Surrey retreated and galloped away. Wallace had achieved a great victory. A total of 5,000 English infantry and 100 knights had been killed in what amounted to an embarrassment for Edward I.

KING EDWARD I

English, 1239-1307

Brief Bio

Son of Henry III, King Edward I had a burning desire to expand his empire and was a warring king, albeit one well established and highly regarded by his peers. Having invaded Wales in 1277, eventually taking it over in 1301, he had his eyes on France and Scotland. To fund his battles he raised money through ever-increasing taxation and built an army that was greatly feared in the process.

back across the bridge or through any advancing Scots line. Surrey was aware of the danger but De Cressingham and others were insistent. A Council of War was called and, finally, Surrey decided he was ready to attack. The troops were sent back over the bridge and Wallace readied his spearmen who were arranged in groups, each with a specific instruction for the upcoming battle.

The Scottish spearmen made up the bulk of Wallace's army – they were the Scots' answer to the English cavalry. With their 3.7-metre (12-foot) long sharp poles, the spears were a deadly alternative. Held aloft and at full charge, they would have caused many a rivals' mouth to gape open in fearful anticipation. For a second time, though, there was a delay in action as Surrey decided that he should approach Wallace. Recalling his troops, he sent two Dominican friars to see the Scotsman but Wallace's reply was crystal clear: "Tell your commander that we are not here to make peace but to do battle, defend ourselves and liberate our kingdom. Let them come on, and we shall prove this in their very beards."

The English were again having doubts and an alternative crossing was pointed out: a ford further along the river that would not only be quicker to cross but would also allow the English to get behind the Scots. De Cressingham ruled this out, though. He was worried that it would take too long to move the soldiers again and that this would incur extra costs for the English king. There was no persuading him otherwise.

Scottish

TROOPS 8,000

CAVALRY 35

LOSSES UNKNOWN

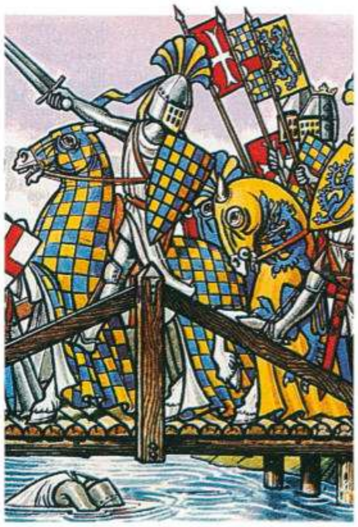
WILLIAM WALLACE

LEADER

Wallace's stature as a fearless leader rose following his slaying of the English sheriff of Lanark, William Heselrig. Men joined him, striking at Scone, Ancrum and Dundee. He proved to be a good, tactical thinker.

Strengths Unafraid to get stuck in, his beliefs and desire for a free Scotland motivated his army.

Weaknesses Lack of true nobility meant he wasn't universally accepted.



SPEARMAN

KEY UNIT

With the majority of the Scots nobles under lock and key in England, Wallace's army was made up of men from lower society, but they were strong and willing.

Strengths Although seen as peasant amateur fighters, they nevertheless fought well as a unit thanks to the army's tactics.

Weaknesses When up against better-organised opposition, as proved at Falkirk, they were left wanting.

LONG SPEARS

KEY WEAPON

Although the Scots used axes and knives, their 3.7m (12ft) long spears caused the most damage. It was a spear that killed Hugh Cressingham, piercing his armour.

Strengths The length of the spears provided extra distance between the soldier and his victim.

Weaknesses They were very unwieldy whenever they had to be used in close-quarters fighting.

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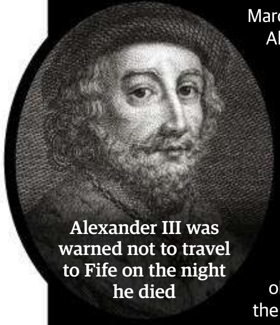
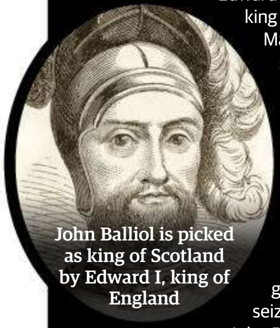
Three reasons for war

Death of King Alexander III


Alexander III was warned not to travel to Fife on the night he died

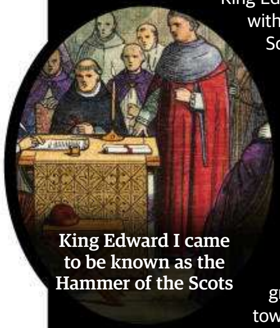
Keen to see his second wife on 18 March 1286, the King of Scots Alexander III travelled on horseback from Edinburgh Castle to the royal palace of Kinghorn in Fife. Although he had been warned about the treacherous weather, the king fell from his horse along the way and died, aged 44. Since his three children, Margaret, Alexander and David, were also dead, it left his three-year-old granddaughter Margaret as the sole heir. However, there was a desire by the Scots to be ruled by a king rather than a queen, which prompted a call for King Edward I of England to intervene.

Greater English control

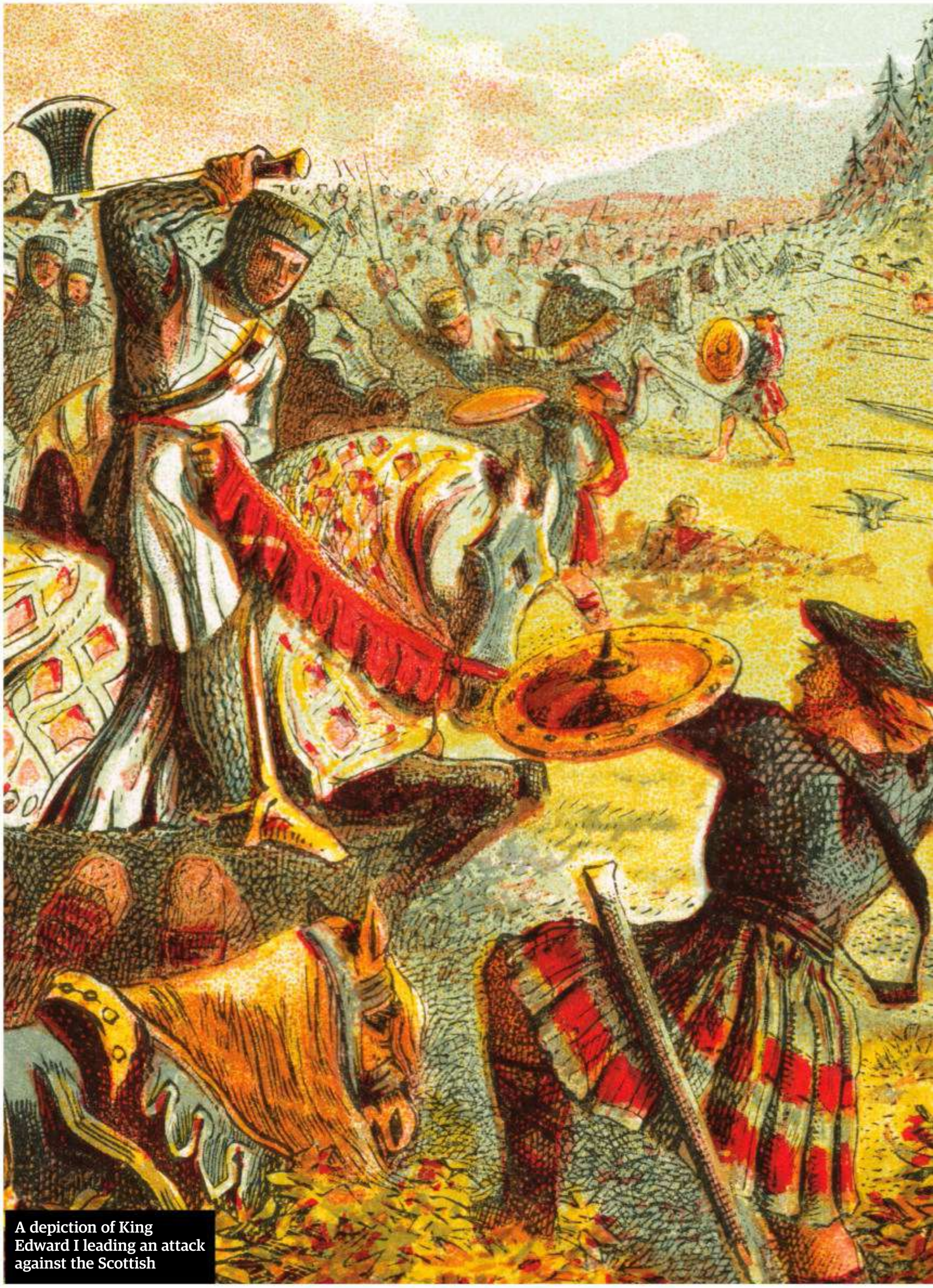

John Balliol is picked as king of Scotland by Edward I, king of England

Edward I was asked to help pick a new king for Scotland. He suggested Margaret marry his eldest son, six-year-old Prince Edward, but before this could take place – a move that would have made Prince Edward king – Margaret fell ill and died in 1290. She had not been crowned at this point. Edward I agreed to judge who should be crowned next but, in the process, tightened his grip on Scotland and began to seize assets. He picked nobleman John Balliol as king but it became clear Edward I planed to use him as a puppet.

French-Scottish treaty


King Edward I came to be known as the Hammer of the Scots

King Edward I wanted to go to war with France and he insisted the Scots join him in the battle but in 1295 John Balliol and Philip IV of France signed a treaty instead. If England invaded either Scotland or France, the other agreed to invade England. Edward I saw his grip loosening and in 1296 sent troops to the Scottish border. Balliol's decision to sack Cumberland was met with great force in the then-Scottish town of Berwick, leading to Balliol's defeat and subsequent dethroning. The English army continued to move north to Dunbar where a battle took place. The War of Independence was on.


A depiction of King Edward I leading an attack against the Scottish

Scotland's long journey to Stirling Bridge

122

Hadrian's Wall
As Roman Emperor Hadrian rules Britain, he decides to build a defence wall to help prevent an invasion from the north. With locally sourced materials, the wall reaches a length of 117.5km (73mi). **122 CE**

Western independence
There are two Gaelic kingdoms called Dairada, one in Ireland and one in western Scotland. They are dependent on each other but King Aidan secures Scottish independence for Argyllshire.
575

Capture of Edinburgh
The Kingdom of Northumbria, formed in 604, decides to capture Edinburgh from Gododdin, a kingdom in the northeast of Britannia. It keeps it for three centuries.
638

Burning of Iona
Iona, a small island in the Inner Hebrides on the western coast of Scotland, is set alight by the Vikings which had been raiding and trading around the world from the 8th century.
802

Scottish king
Kenneth MacAlpin I is crowned king and begins the House of Alpin. The crown will alternate between two descendant branches of MacAlpin.
842

Essential Wallace figures

1,600

In 1296, this number of Scotland's leading nobles swore loyalty to Edward I. Wallace did not.

1300

The year the king of France wrote to his envoys in Rome demanding that they should help Wallace, leading some to believe he had personally visited the French king.

5

The number of places parts of his dead body were displayed – his head was placed on London Bridge and his limbs were put on show in Perth, Stirling, Berwick and Newcastle.

1297

Wallace was first named in English chronicles in this year, following the murder of the English sheriff of Lanark.

715

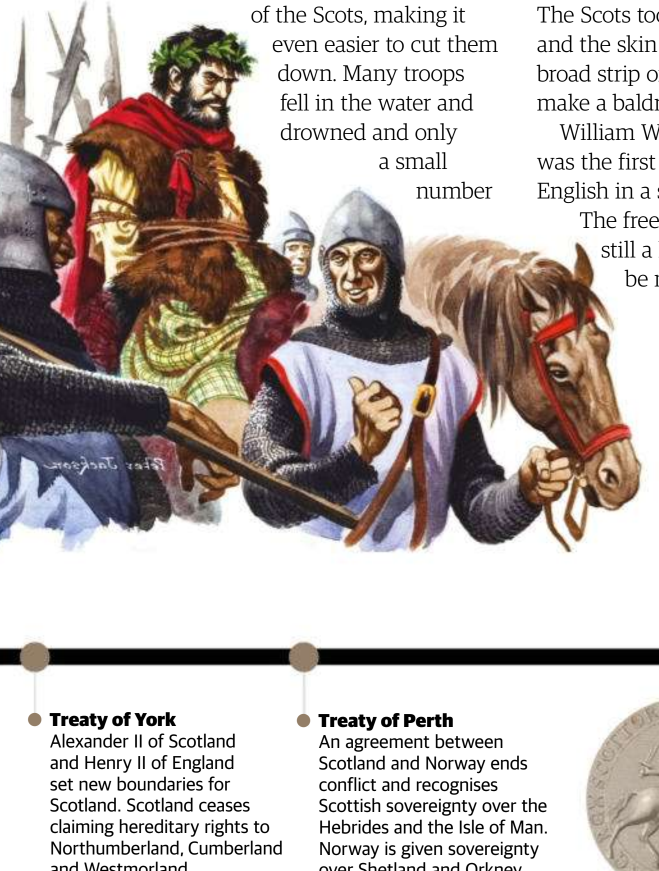
The number of villages in the north of England that were burnt by Wallace and his men following their victory at Stirling Bridge.

The English troops crossed the bridge once again and Wallace knew this time they wouldn't turn back – the battle was now imminent. He urged patience to his men, commanding his troops crouched on the hillside, eager to get going, to rein in their blood lust just until enough Englishmen had crossed. Eventually, as the hours ticked by, around 5,400 English and Welsh infantry as well as some cavalry had made their way across the river. Before they could even begin to advance forward in order, though, Wallace gave the word.

The Scots' spearmen charged from their advantageous position on the lower slopes of the Ochil Hills, down toward the unprepared English cavalry. One Scottish group went toward the bridge, cutting it off and preventing more English from crossing. Surrey's hope that his bowmen would be able to take their positions was destroyed since they had yet to get over the bridge. The Scots were nullifying them. Another group of Scots went down the other wing and a large group went into the middle. As the horses were skewered and the knights fell to the ground, the blood began to mix with the cold and clear water in the Scottish river.

> "The English were cut to pieces as the Scots raged forward, pushing their rivals back toward the river"

The English were cut to pieces as the Scots raged forward, pushing their rivals back toward the river. The English troops were separated into much smaller groups by the thrust of the Scots, making it even easier to cut them down. Many troops fell in the water and drowned and only a small number managed to swim successfully back to the other side. Sir Marmaduke Tweng was the only knight to escape with his life. Amid the carnage, De Moray, who had been commanding the northern Scots, was seriously wounded, but Wallace was getting stuck in, urging his troops to continue pressing on. It caused panic among the English, who had thought the battle would be nothing more than a formality. Unused to what they saw as savagery by an inferior, untrained army, they were trying to retreat as best they could but soon found themselves completely and utterly surrounded. Surrey, who had not crossed the bridge, was aghast. He ordered the rest of his men, some 5,000 more, to retreat. The bridge was set on fire to prevent the Scots from getting across and inflicting further damage. The battle continued for not much longer than an hour, with screams, shouts, and the clash of metal piercing through the air, the looming presence of Stirling Castle behind them as a reminder that a natural fortress could be just as impenetrable as a man-made one. The remaining Englishmen took flight to Berwick with those who were lagging behind captured or killed.



Surrey escaped unharmed, but the same couldn't be said of his reputation. De Cressingham had been one of the first to cross north and he fell during his attempt to escape, cut through by a Lochaber axe. The Scots took his body away where it was flayed and the skin cut into small pieces. Wallace took a broad strip of De Cressingham's skin and used it to make a baldrick for his sword.

William Wallace had secured a great victory. It was the first time the Scottish had defeated the English in a significant battle since the Dark Ages. The freedom for which Wallace strived was still a long way off, though, and there would be more battles and challenges to come. As he stood there, exhausted and triumphant on the battlefield, he pushed thoughts of the future out of his mind. For now, he would savour the taste of a victory that once more made a nation dream – and perhaps even believe – that it could achieve freedom once again.

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Feudal system introduced
David I becomes king and rules until 1153. His reign is referred to as the Davidian Revolution because he founds burghs, monasteries, feudalism and the Normanisation of the Scottish government.
1124

Allegiance to England
The Treaty of Falaise is signed by the captive Scottish King William I and King Henry II. It states that Scotland will now be subordinate to the English crown.
1174

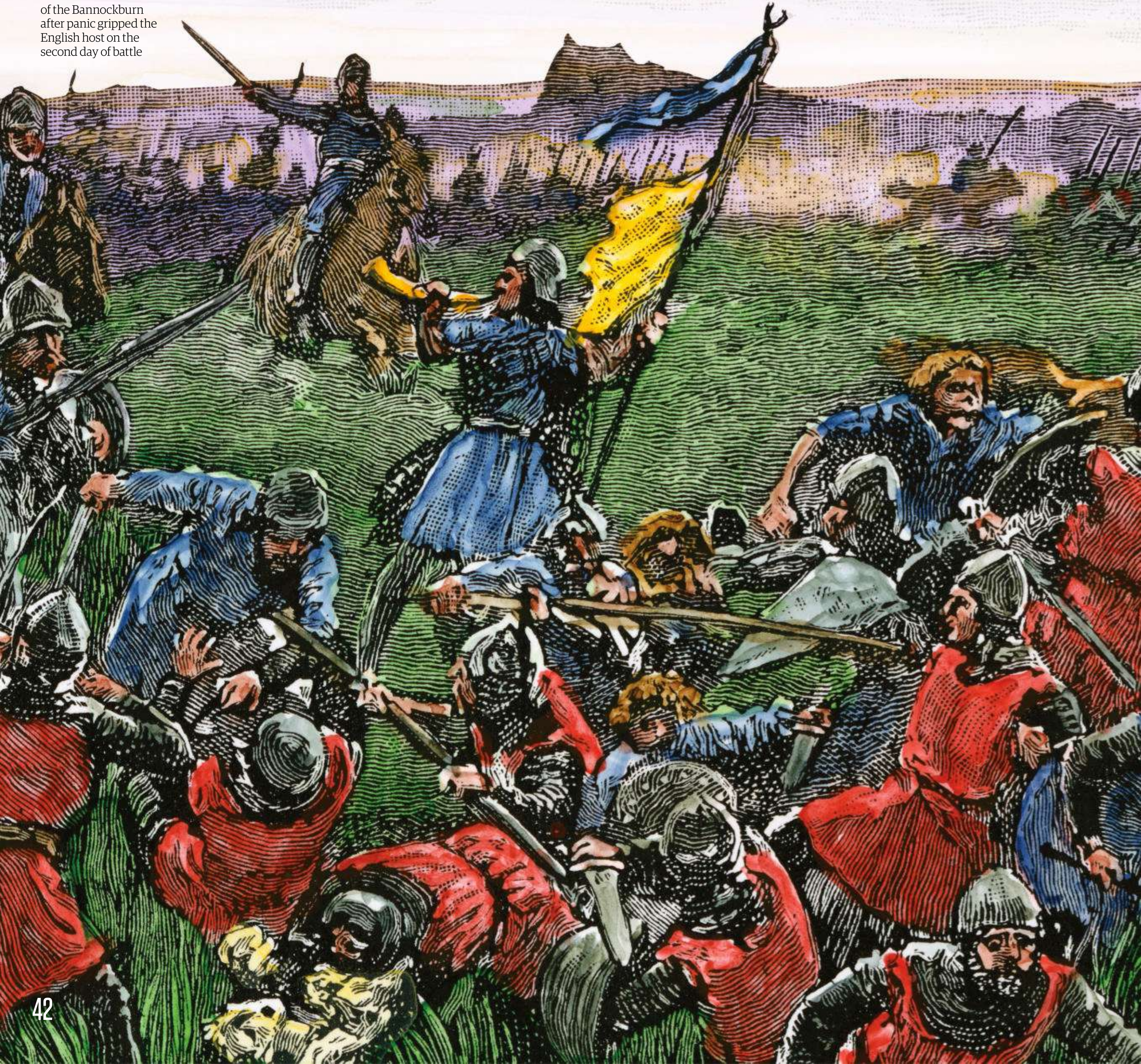
Treaty of York
Alexander II of Scotland and Henry II of England set new boundaries for Scotland. Scotland ceases claiming hereditary rights to Northumberland, Cumberland and Westmorland.
1237

Treaty of Perth
An agreement between Scotland and Norway ends conflict and recognises Scottish sovereignty over the Hebrides and the Isle of Man. Norway is given sovereignty over Shetland and Orkney.
1266

1292

Claims of independence
The Scottish Wars of Independence are sparked thanks to numerous factors, not least the granting of the Scottish throne to John Balliol. It leads to the rise of William Wallace.
1292

BATTLE OF BANNOCKBURN



The Scots drive their foe into the waters of the Bannockburn after panic gripped the English host on the second day of battle

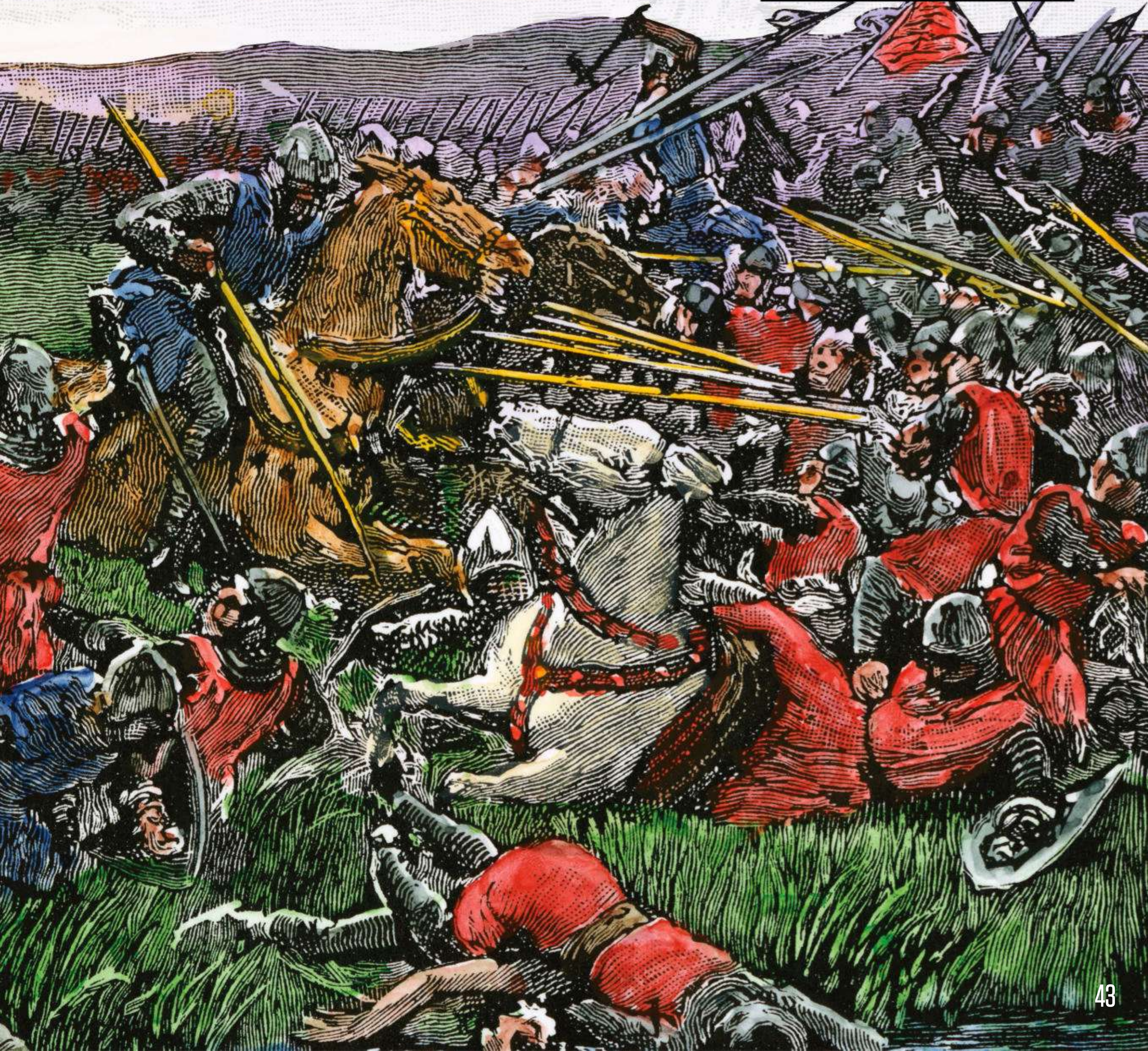
SOUTHEAST SCOTLAND, 23-24 JUNE 1314

Dawn had only just begun to break on the morning of 24 June as a wall of Scottish pikemen advanced in force across the dewy ground, their weapons pointed threateningly in the direction of the invading enemy. Halting, they formed a seemingly impenetrable barricade of men and arms, bristling with sharp iron points. Though they had heard they were outnumbered, the king of Scotland's men were resolute – they knew that victory on this day could form a turning point for the future of their country. The Battle of Bannockburn stands as the greatest triumph of Scottish arms over an English army during the First War of Scottish Independence. King Robert I masterminded the decisive defeat of a substantially larger English force under Edward II, whose objective was to raise the siege of English-held Stirling Castle.

At first glance, the clash between the mighty host of England, with its well-equipped heavy cavalry and veteran infantry, against a hastily mustered peasant army of much smaller Scotland might seem an uneven contest heavily favouring the English. However, Robert the Bruce was able to tip the odds in the favour of the Scots by repeated drilling of his infantry, his intimate knowledge

OPPOSING FORCES

ENGLAND	VS	SCOTLAND
LEADERS		LEADERS
King Edward II Gilbert de Clare Humphrey de Bohun		Robert the Bruce Thomas Randolph Edward Bruce
INFANTRY 14,000		INFANTRY 6,000
CAVALRY 2,000		LIGHT CAVALRY 500
ARCHERS 2,000		



of the local terrain, and the use of innovative tactics. These factors, together with the tactical incompetence of Edward II, combined to effectively blunt the force of the English attack and create a stunning military upset.

Throughout most of the 13th century, the monarchies of England and Scotland had been on amiable terms. That indispensable ingredient of Medieval diplomacy – intermarriage – had ensured that the two peoples got along well. What's more, the Scottish nobility saw peace as particularly important to them because they held feudal lands on both sides of the border.

All of this came to a crashing end, though, when Scottish King Alexander III fell from his horse and broke his neck in 1286, precipitating a succession crisis. The leading claimants to the throne were John Balliol and Robert the Bruce. The shrewd English King Edward I was asked to mediate and he ruled in favour of Balliol in 1292 on the condition that he acknowledged Edward's right as an overlord.

The Scots were not keen on going to war with Edward, whose armies were among the best in Europe, but they believed Edward had concocted his right as overlord, as they could find no precedent for it. Edward was furious and began interfering in Scottish affairs. The Scots, in response, made an alliance with France in 1295, designed to curb English aggression.

Edward's chief lieutenant, John de Warrene, led the English heavy cavalry to a victory over their Scottish counterparts at the Battle of Dunbar on 27 April 1296. Edward deposed John Balliol, hauled away the sacred Scottish coronation stone and locked up most of the Scottish nobility.

> "King Alexander III fell from his horse and broke his neck in 1286, precipitating a succession crisis"

These were bitter pills for the Scots to swallow, and patriot William Wallace emerged during the ensuing power vacuum. The younger son of a knight, Wallace ably led the Scots to victory against Edward's inept deputies at the Battle of Stirling Bridge in September 1297. Edward marched north the following year and led a combined arms force to victory against Wallace at Falkirk in July 1298.

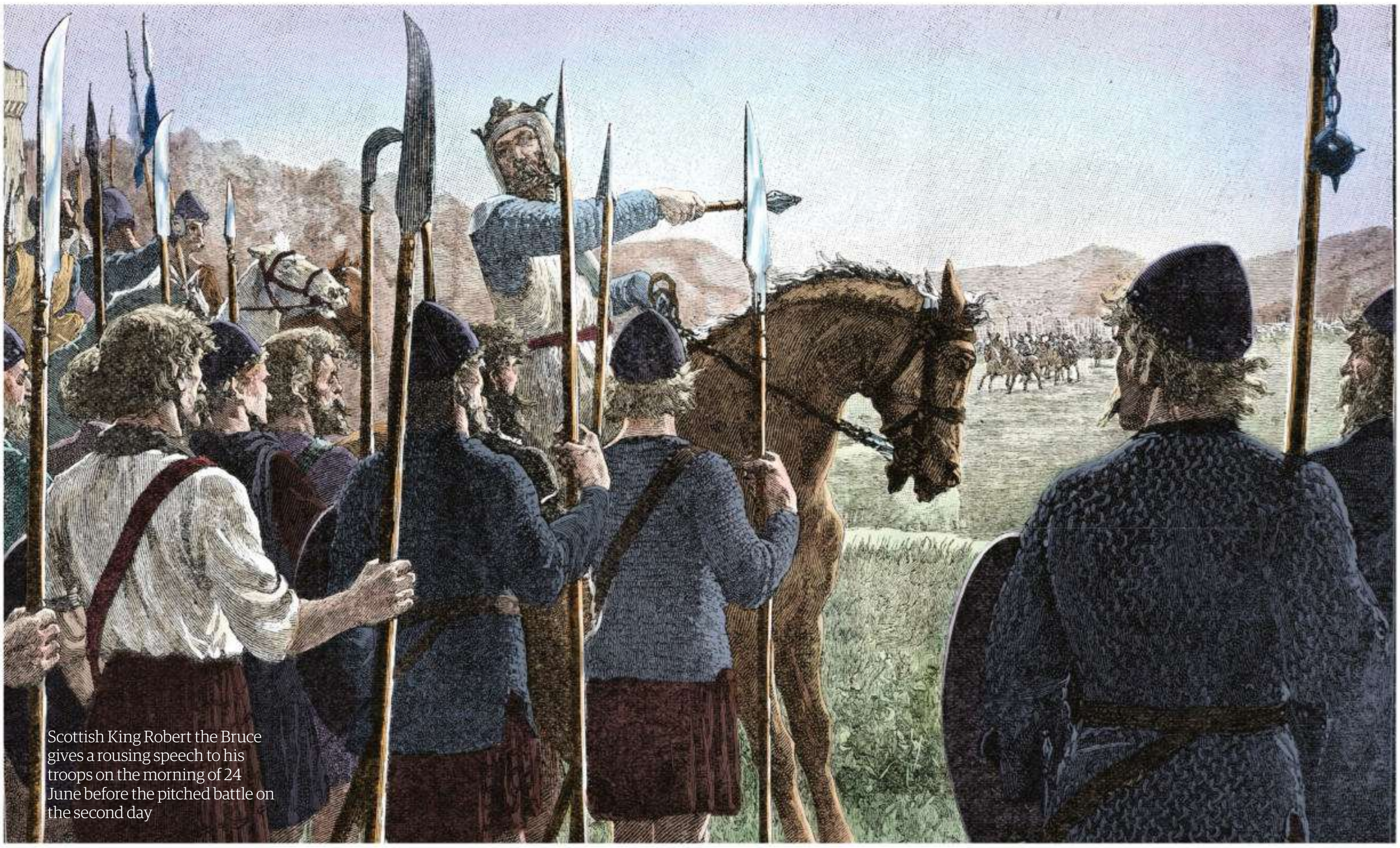
Wallace had been the de facto leader of the Scottish rebellion, but following Falkirk he resigned the guardianship, after which he faded into the background until he was betrayed to the English. Edward had him put to death in 1305. Perhaps Scotland's best hope lay in Bruce, Lord of Annandale, but he had pledged his fealty to Edward in 1302.

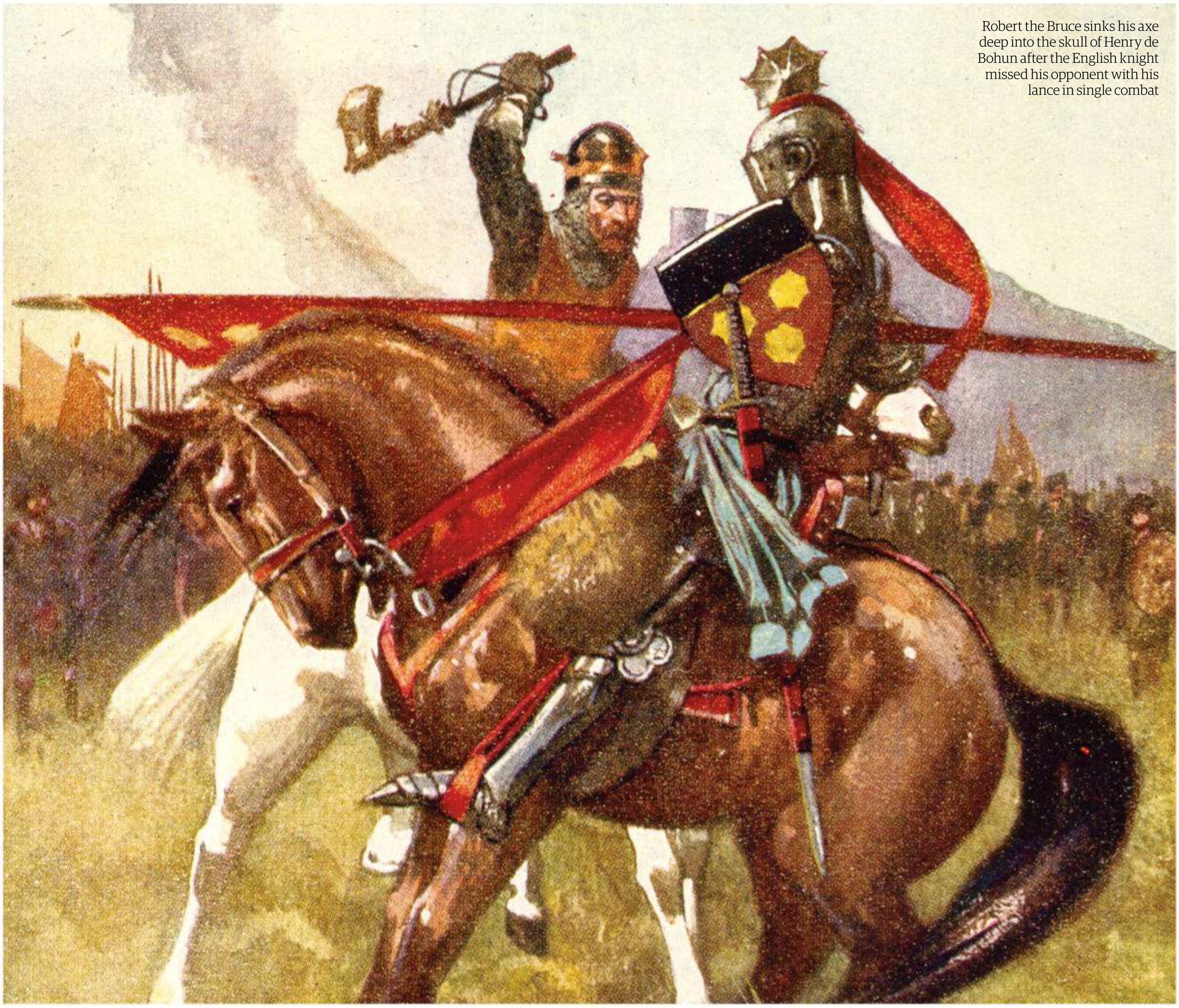
Bruce had a change of heart about taking the throne after he murdered rival John Comyn in a fit of rage during a February 1306 meeting at Greyfriars' church in Dumfries. With the support of some of his fellow nobles, Bruce was crowned king of Scotland on 25 March 1306. Edward vowed to crush Bruce as he had Wallace before him. Fortunately for Bruce, the aging king died en route to Scotland. The task fell to his son, Edward of Caernarfon, to subdue the rebellious Scots.

Bruce at once set about retaking Scottish castles from the English. By the end of March 1314, the Scots had regained all of the English-held castles except Bothwell, Dunbar, and Stirling. The English had captured Stirling Castle, which controlled the bridge over the river Forth, during a three-month siege in 1304. Bruce, who was campaigning in western Scotland in 1313, ordered his brother Edward to retake it.

A shrewd deal

Lacking siege engines, Edward Bruce had no choice but to starve Stirling Castle's garrison into submission. Sir Philip Mowbray, a Scotsman who remained loyal to Edward II, served as the castellan. He proposed to Edward Bruce in summer 1313 that if an English army had not arrived to within three leagues of the castle by 24 June 1314, then he would surrender the fortress. Edward


Scottish King Robert the Bruce gives a rousing speech to his troops on the morning of 24 June before the pitched battle on the second day



Robert the Bruce sinks his axe deep into the skull of Henry de Bohun after the English knight missed his opponent with his lance in single combat

agreed to the deal. It was a shrewd move on the part of Mowbray, because it bought Edward II a full year to raise the siege.

King Edward issued writs of summons to 87 barons with instructions that they should furnish troops that were to assemble at Berwick in May 1314. Only a few English earls agreed to personally participate in the campaign. These were Gilbert de Clare (Earl of Gloucester), Humphrey de Bohun (Earl of Hereford), and Aymer de Valence (Earl of Pembroke). The king made his nephew de Clare co-commander of the English vanguard along with de Bohun and appointed de Clare constable of England for the campaign. De Bohun, who had much more experience and was the constable by hereditary right, seethed over the matter in the days leading up to the battle. When word reached the English monarch that Scottish units were deployed in marshlands where it would be difficult for heavy cavalry to operate, he sent a letter directly to his sheriffs advising them of the need for as many foot soldiers as they could send.

Ultimately, the English mustered 14,000 billmen, 2,000 archers and 2,000 cavalry. Parliament did not issue a formal summons for the feudal host, and therefore it is impossible to know the precise number of knights and squires who participated. After reporting to Berwick, the units moved into bivouacs west of the city on the south bank of the River Tyne.

Bruce began assembling his army six kilometres south of Stirling Castle at Torwood in mid May. He and his captains drilled their 6,000 spearmen repeatedly to raise morale and ensure they would work well together when they went into battle. The Scottish infantry carried four-metre-long pikes, which they used in a versatile fashion both as an offensive and defensive weapon. In the case of the latter, which was used primarily when defending against cavalry, the Scottish spearmen formed themselves into a circle known as a schiltron with their menacing iron tips facing out in all directions. If cavalry pierced the schiltron, the Scots used axes and swords to hack their foe to death.

The English troops crossed the Tyne at Wark and Coldstream on 17 June. De Clare led the mounted vanguard; the infantry that constituted the bulk of the main and rear guards tramped slowly behind. At sunset on 22 June, the English vanguard arrived in Falkirk. When Bruce learned that the English were nearby, he ordered his forces to fall back two kilometres to the New Park, a hunting preserve for the lord of Stirling Castle. The wooded tract was situated on the eastern edge of an escarpment that ended a short distance from the Carse of Balquhidderock, a low-lying, tidal marshland on the north side of a narrow stream known as the Bannockburn. A dry field separated the wooded escarpment from the carse.

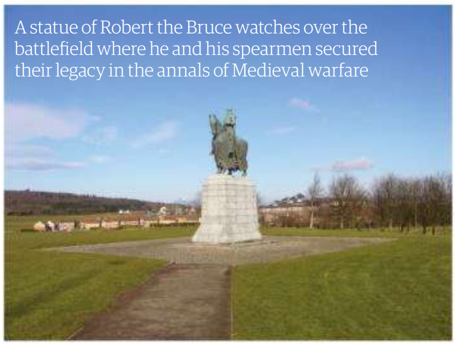
Bruce knew that the sprawling marshland would hamper operations of the English heavy cavalry. The Scottish infantry was divided into three battles, or divisions. For marching purposes, Bruce led the vanguard, Edward Bruce led the mainguard, and Thomas Randolph, Earl of Moray, led the rearguard. The Scottish army countermarched to the New Park on 22 June with Moray leading the column and Bruce bringing up the rear. The two cavalry brigades, one of which was led by Sir Robert Keith and the other by Lord James Douglas, guarded the column's flanks.

Quest for personal glory

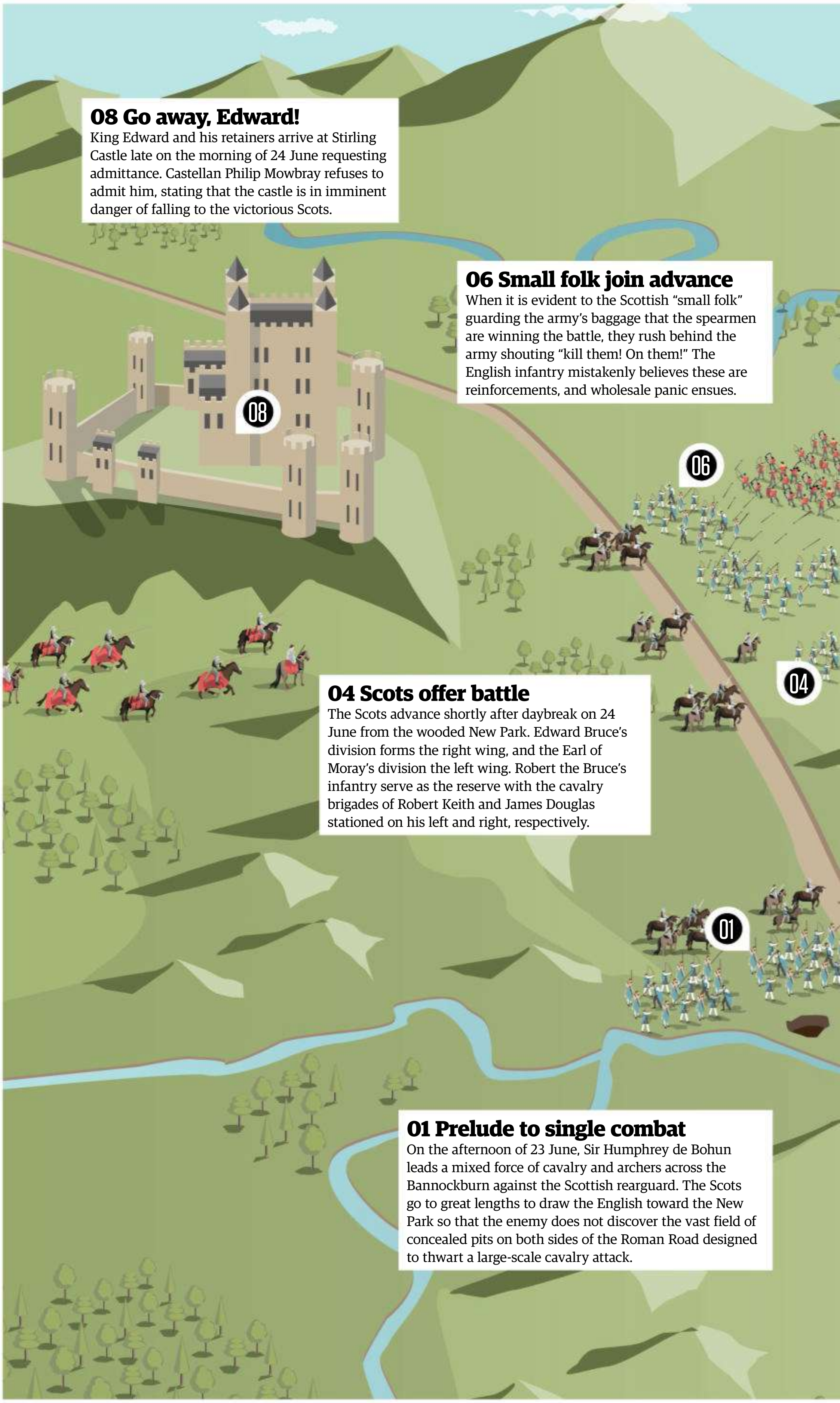
Bruce set the Scots to work immediately digging hundreds of shallow pits along both sides of the Roman Road on the north side of the Bannockburn. The Scots dug one-foot-wide, three-foot-deep holes that they covered with grass and brush. The pits were intended to disrupt an English cavalry attack - when a horse stepped into the pit both horse and rider would come crashing to the ground.

On the morning of 23 June, the Scottish vanguard advanced up the road toward the Bannockburn crossing. When he spied movement to the west on the north side of the Bannockburn, de Clare dispatched de Bohun with a small force of cavalry and archers to engage the Scots. While the two forces drew near, Humphrey's nephew, Henry de Bohun, spied Bruce riding on a palfrey near the tree line. The glory-seeking English knight spurred his horse, lowered his lance, and rode to engage Bruce. Just before Henry's lance hit home, Bruce turned his horse, causing Henry to miss him. Bruce then stood in his stirrups on his short horse and swung his axe. The force of the blow penetrated both helmet and skull, snapping the shaft of the king's axe in the process. Henry's body fell lifeless to the ground.

De Clare, who mistakenly assumed that the Scots might be retreating further north, ordered Baron Robert Clifford and Henry Beaumont to lead 300



A statue of Robert the Bruce watches over the battlefield where he and his spearmen secured their legacy in the annals of Medieval warfare



08 Go away, Edward!

King Edward and his retainers arrive at Stirling Castle late on the morning of 24 June requesting admittance. Castellan Philip Mowbray refuses to admit him, stating that the castle is in imminent danger of falling to the victorious Scots.

06 Small folk join advance

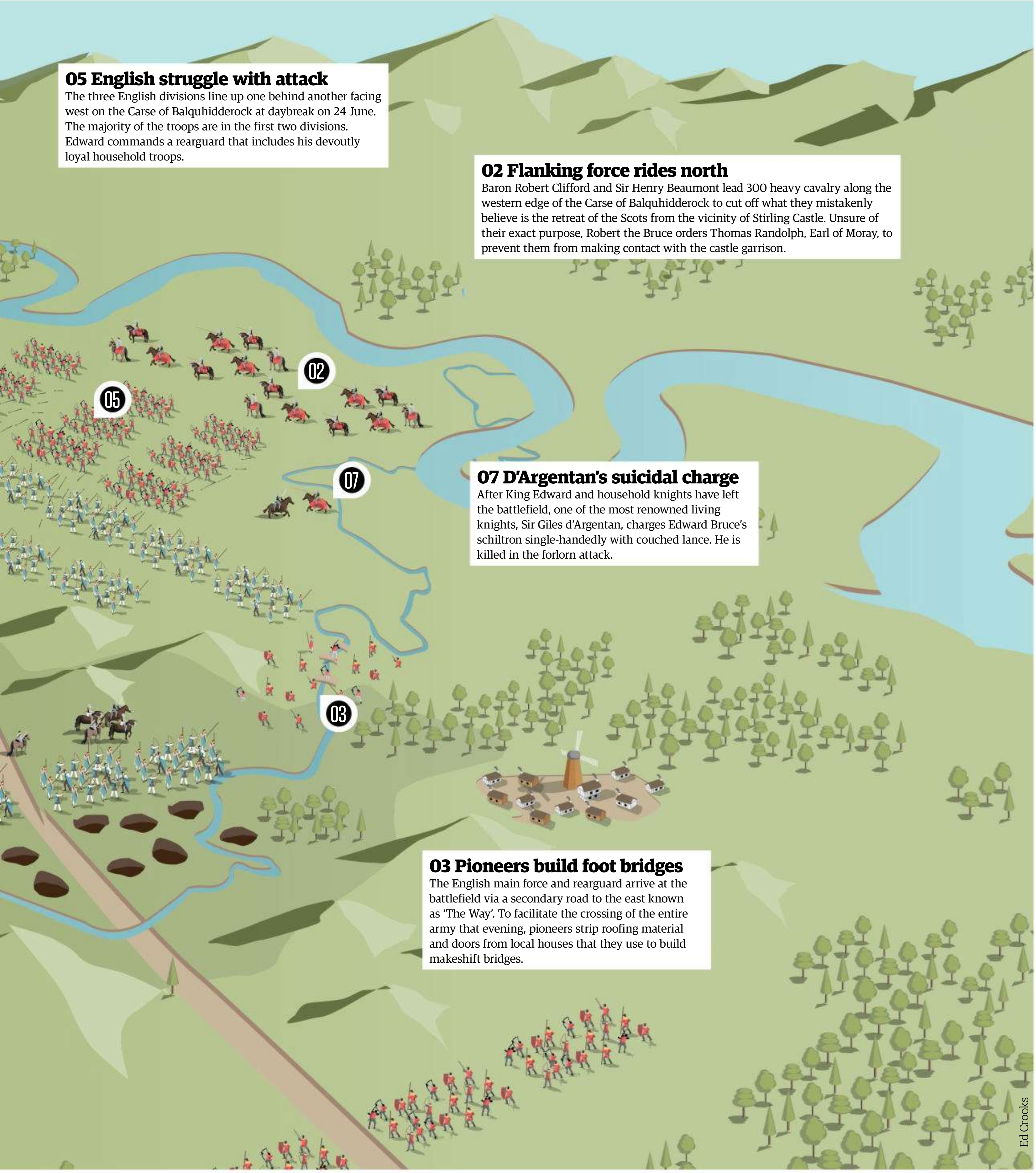
When it is evident to the Scottish "small folk" guarding the army's baggage that the spearmen are winning the battle, they rush behind the army shouting "kill them! On them!" The English infantry mistakenly believes these are reinforcements, and wholesale panic ensues.

04 Scots offer battle

The Scots advance shortly after daybreak on 24 June from the wooded New Park. Edward Bruce's division forms the right wing, and the Earl of Moray's division the left wing. Robert the Bruce's infantry serve as the reserve with the cavalry brigades of Robert Keith and James Douglas stationed on his left and right, respectively.

01 Prelude to single combat

On the afternoon of 23 June, Sir Humphrey de Bohun leads a mixed force of cavalry and archers across the Bannockburn against the Scottish rearguard. The Scots go to great lengths to draw the English toward the New Park so that the enemy does not discover the vast field of concealed pits on both sides of the Roman Road designed to thwart a large-scale cavalry attack.



05 English struggle with attack

The three English divisions line up one behind another facing west on the Carse of Balquhidderock at daybreak on 24 June. The majority of the troops are in the first two divisions. Edward commands a rearguard that includes his devoutly loyal household troops.

02 Flanking force rides north

Baron Robert Clifford and Sir Henry Beaumont lead 300 heavy cavalry along the western edge of the Carse of Balquhidderock to cut off what they mistakenly believe is the retreat of the Scots from the vicinity of Stirling Castle. Unsure of their exact purpose, Robert the Bruce orders Thomas Randolph, Earl of Moray, to prevent them from making contact with the castle garrison.

07 D'Argentan's suicidal charge

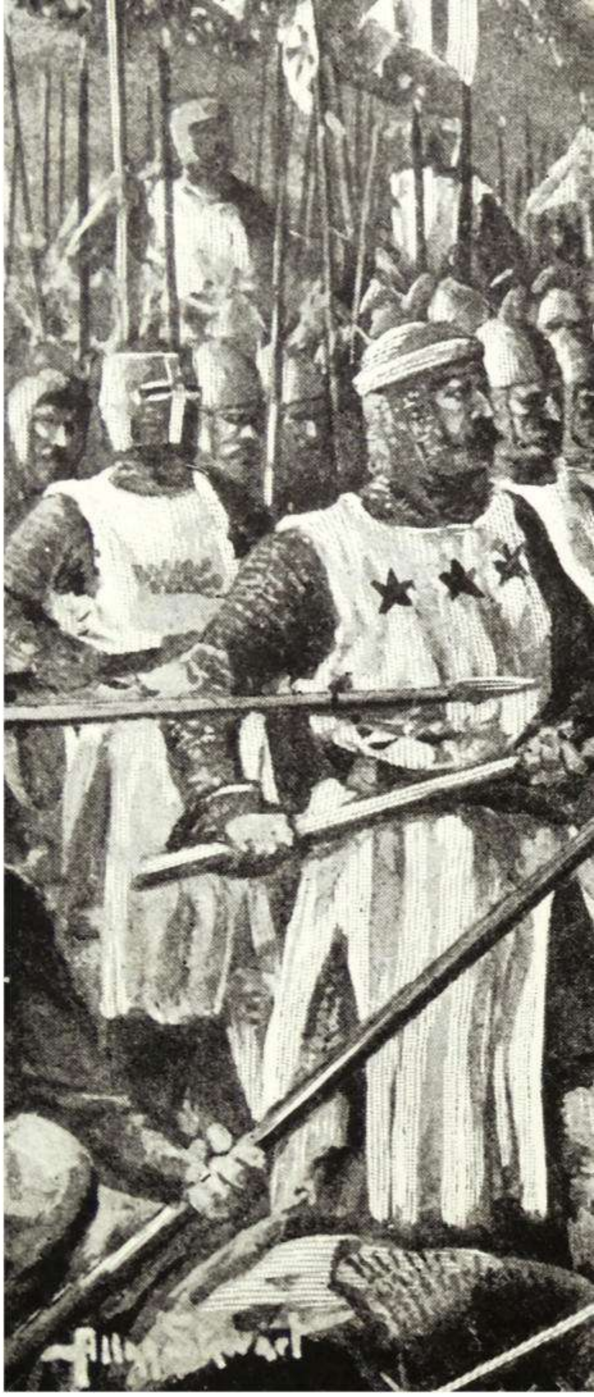
After King Edward and household knights have left the battlefield, one of the most renowned living knights, Sir Giles d'Argentan, charges Edward Bruce's schiltron single-handedly with couched lance. He is killed in the forlorn attack.

03 Pioneers build foot bridges

The English main force and rearguard arrive at the battlefield via a secondary road to the east known as 'The Way'. To facilitate the crossing of the entire army that evening, pioneers strip roofing material and doors from local houses that they use to build makeshift bridges.

Ed Crooks

King Robert the Bruce is today remembered in Scotland as a national hero



cavalry on a wide flanking march to cut off the Scottish retreat. Moray deployed his division to engage the English flankers. The Scots formed a schiltron with their pikes protruding outward. Clifford gave the order to attack, and the English in the front charged with couched lances against the spear formation. Lances and spears clacked loudly together on contact. Many of the English were unhorsed in the charge. The English cavalry lapped around the schiltron the way eager flames wrap around a fire log. Despite their courageous attack, the armoured horsemen could not break the wall of spears. Neither side suffered any appreciable casualties. After a short time, Clifford ordered a general withdrawal.

That night, the English army slept on its arms in the low-lying ground in the V formed by the confluence of the Pelstream and Bannockburn. It was "an evil, deep, wet marsh," wrote Thomas Gray, who was present at the battle. "The English army unharnessed and remained all night having lost confidence and being too much disaffected by the events of the day."

Neither side got much rest that evening, as the night was only five hours long. With some of his troops still arriving from the south, Edward held a council of war with his earls. Some suggested he wait a day to see if the Scots withdrew, as the terrain favoured the enemy. Besides, they said, the relief army already had arrived to within three leagues of the castle, which meant the Stirling garrison would not have to surrender. Edward overruled them, as he did not want the Scots to escape.

Bruce had been considering a withdrawal to the Lennox district. But when Sir Alexander Seton defected to the Scottish side during the night, he informed Bruce that the morale of the English was extremely low. Based on that information, Bruce decided to give battle.

"A thick-set hedge"

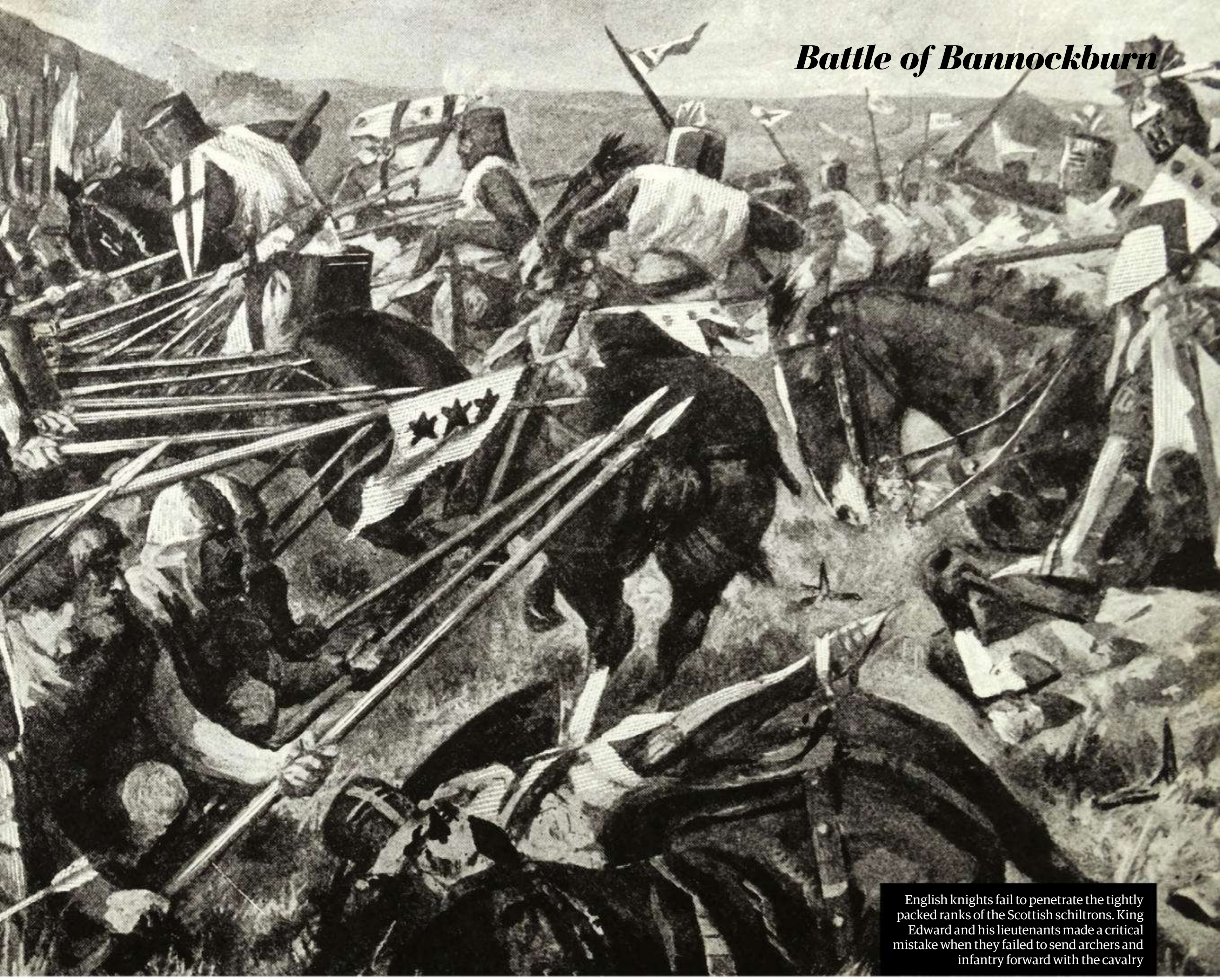
On the day of the battle, King Edward remained confident in the supremacy of his arms; he fully expected to crush the Scots that day.

The constant drilling in the preceding days undoubtedly paid off for the Scots. "They advanced like a thick-set hedge, and such a phalanx could not easily be broken," wrote the anonymous author of the *Vita Edwardi Secundi*.

Although the *Lanercost Chronicle* mentions a brief archery duel in which the English outmatched the Scots, this is not supported by other contemporary sources. The English rushed to get ready for battle. Once his cavalry was assembled, de Clare led them forward at a trot. The heavily armoured horsemen on their mighty destriers gained speed when they rode onto a dry field between the carse and the forest. Fortunately for the English, the cavalry traps were arrayed for an enemy attack from the south, and therefore they did not impede their advance. The English cavalry recoiled before the impenetrable wall of iron-tipped spears. The narrow front over which they were attacking prohibited, at least initially, their deploying any archers on the wings. With no infantry or archers advancing with them, the cavalry simply could not inflict enough casualties in the tightly packed ranks of spearmen to create gaps that they could exploit.

The English steeds generally shied away from the sharp points, but some knights were able to get their destriers to ride straight onto the spear tips. The mighty beasts screamed in agony as they were disembowelled by multiple spears. Some knights resorted to hacking at the spear shafts with their swords or axes, while others hurled their edged weapons into the tight ranks hoping to kill enough of the enemy to create a gap they might penetrate. Those knights that somehow found a way inside

> "The force of the blow penetrated both helmet and skull, snapping the shaft of the king's axe in the process"



English knights fail to penetrate the tightly packed ranks of the Scottish schiltrons. King Edward and his lieutenants made a critical mistake when they failed to send archers and infantry forward with the cavalry

the spear rings were surrounded by the enemy, hauled from their saddles, and hacked to death by axe-wielding Scotsmen. De Clare quickly became separated from his household knights, so the Scots unhorsed and killed him.

The English longbowmen initially tried to shoot over the attacking cavalry, but this proved unfeasible. Although it is unclear who issued the order, a large group of English and Welsh archers forded the Pelstream and began showering the left flank of Moray's division with arrows. Seeing the threat, Bruce ordered Keith's cavalry to drive off the English. When the Scottish horse charged, the archers fled. If the Scottish cavalry had not undertaken such prompt action, the course of the battle might have been altered. Their archers' volleys were "so fast that if their shooting had persisted it would have gone hard for the Scots," in the words of Scottish chronicler John Barbour.

The English cavalry eventually broke off its attack, and the survivors retreated east through the infantry. The English infantry appeared not as well-led units but as one large mass milling about without clear orders. The confusion of the battlefield, combined with the soggy ground on which the infantry was deployed, worked against a follow-on attack.

Sensing the English army was nearing its breaking point, Bruce ordered a counterattack. The schiltrons advanced with the men maintaining their tight formations. The Scottish captains shouted "Push! Push! Push!" to maintain unyielding pressure on the floundering English ranks. Brave English billmen hacked futilely at the spear walls in a vain effort to buy time. The sound of contact made by hundreds of wooden shafts crackled through the air as spearmen and billmen battled in a test of strength. The Scots steadily drove the English from the dry field back into the close confines of the carse. Many of the English slipped in the muck and gore and were trampled to death as the Scots drove them back. Edward watched in shock as his army gradually unravelled before his eyes; he attempted to ride forward to rally his troops.

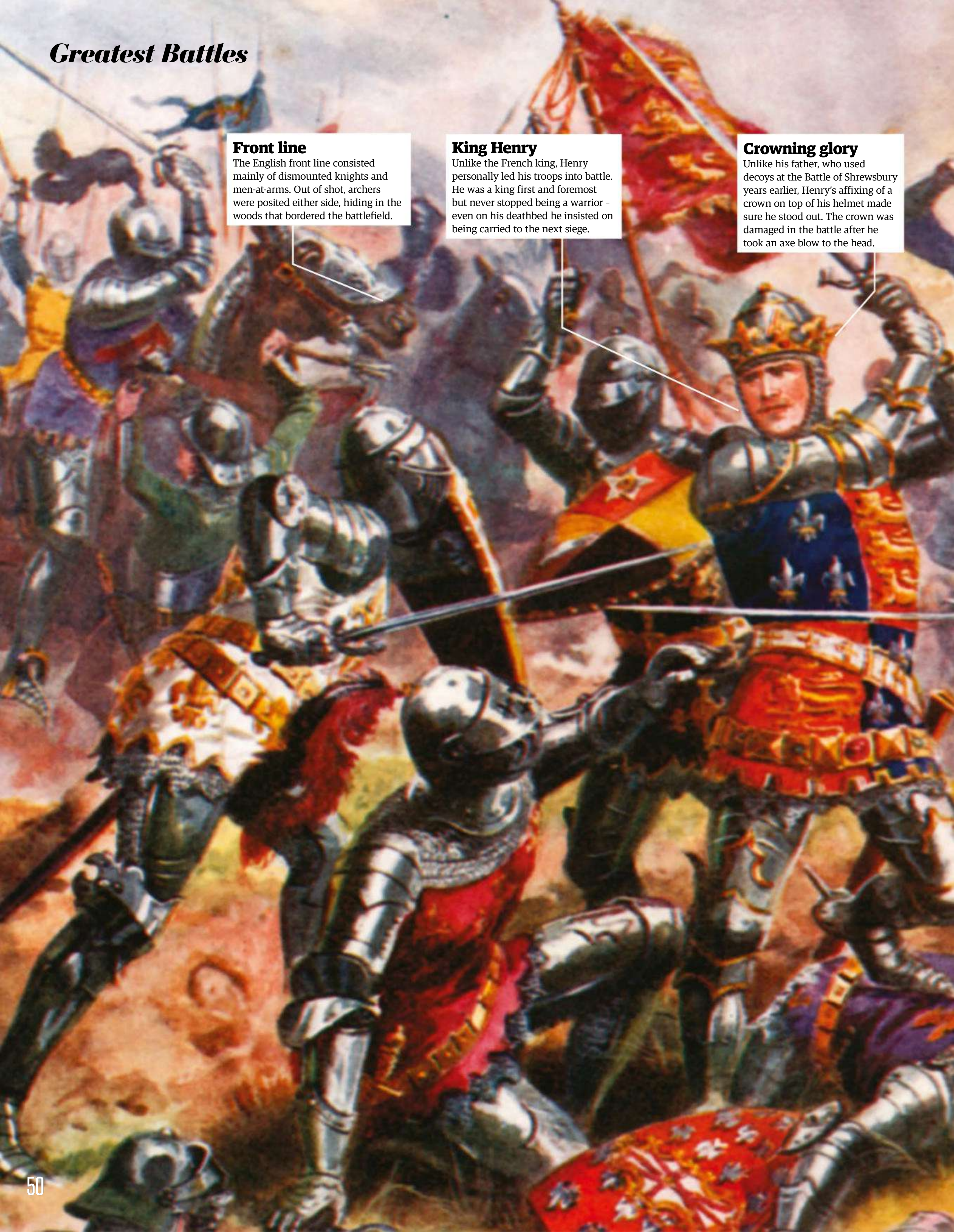
Pembroke and Sir Giles d'Argentan led the king away from the battle. They admonished him to escape as quickly as possible with his household guard to avoid capture or death. "Off he went, though much against the grain," wrote Gray. The royal party struck north for Stirling Castle. It was an ignominious end for the king who had been confident of total victory only hours before.

Scotland victorious

Bruce's superb leadership and skilled use of terrain directly contributed to the Scottish victory. at Bannockburn. Edward and his lieutenants were overconfident and lax. They not only failed to reconnoitre the terrain, but made no concerted effort to use their archers to weaken the schiltrons before or during the climactic action on the morning of the second day.

The Scots were well fed and rested, and this contributed to their superb performance on the second day. The English were hungry, exhausted, wet and sleep deprived on the day on which the main battle took place. The Scots captured Stirling Castle on 20 July, but it would be 14 more years before they won formal recognition of their independence from England through the Treaty of Edinburgh-Northampton on 17 March 1328.

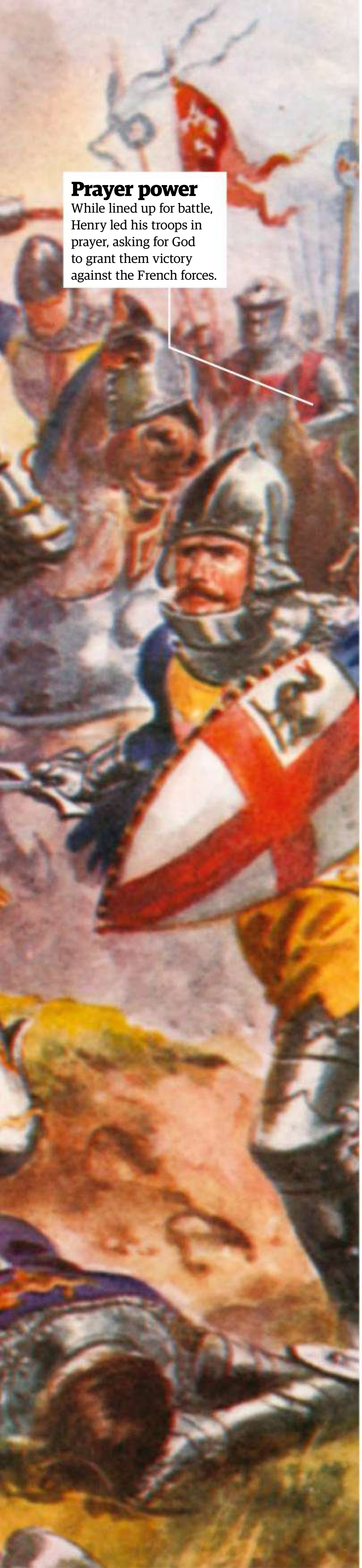
Images: Alamy



Front line
The English front line consisted mainly of dismounted knights and men-at-arms. Out of shot, archers were posited either side, hiding in the woods that bordered the battlefield.

King Henry
Unlike the French king, Henry personally led his troops into battle. He was a king first and foremost but never stopped being a warrior - even on his deathbed he insisted on being carried to the next siege.

Crowning glory
Unlike his father, who used decoys at the Battle of Shrewsbury years earlier, Henry's affixing of a crown on top of his helmet made sure he stood out. The crown was damaged in the battle after he took an axe blow to the head.



Prayer power
While lined up for battle, Henry led his troops in prayer, asking for God to grant them victory against the French forces.

BATTLE OF AGINCOURT

AGINCOURT, FRANCE 25 OCTOBER 1415

While his father, Henry IV, had been preoccupied with consolidating – and in the process effectively legitimising – his rule, his son, King Henry V of England, saw the opportunity to expand the British Empire by taking back lands he believed rightfully belonged to him, starting with France.

In 1415, he proposed to marry Catherine, the daughter of the French king Charles VI, in addition to audaciously demanding the handover of the Plantagenet lands of Normandy and Anjou as his dowry. Unsurprisingly, Charles refused this offer from the upstart young king, with one account claiming that he sent the young Henry a case of tennis balls – the upshot being that his time would be better spent playing games than attempting to invade France.

Unperturbed by Charles' taunting, Henry set sail for France, determined to capture the throne for himself. As well as the prospect of regaining the lost lands of his ancestors, success abroad would have the effect of galvanising support back home, and in the process focus attention away from his cousins' royal ambitions.

His success was almost instant. Immediately upon landing, he captured the port of Harfleur, although while on the way to the port of Calais, he found his path blocked by an army that substantially outnumbered his own. Faced with this much-larger French army, he put his superior tactical acumen to good use, decimating the French forces via the use of vast quantities of longbow archers to devastating effect. Between 7,500 and 10,000 French soldiers are estimated to have been killed according to various accounts, with about 1,500 noblemen taken prisoner, while the English forces' casualties are numbered at around 112, with high-ranking noblemen like the Duke of York and the Earl of Suffolk being counted among the dead. Even more French prisoners were originally taken, but in a show of calculated – but arguably justifiable – ruthlessness, Henry had ordered many of them to be put to death in order to avoid the possibility of them linking up with the remnants of the French forces in order to carry out a retaliatory attack.

Proving that this decisive victory was no fluke, Henry followed up this stunning victory with the conquest of Normandy – a campaign that lasted for three years. By June 1419, Henry controlled most of Normandy. Agincourt had not only been a military triumph; it had been a moral victory too, galvanising the English both abroad and at home.

Facing defeat, Charles agreed to the Treaty of Troyes, which formally recognised Henry as the heir to the French throne – at the expense of his own son – and finally allowed Henry to marry Catherine. Flushed with success, in February 1421 he returned to England for the first time in three and a half years, arriving in his homeland as a conquering hero.

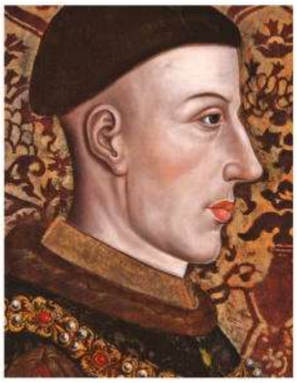
His successful conquest of much of the his country's hated enemy had made him extremely popular back home, and the Battle of Agincourt in particular would forever serve as a poignant example of his strength, tactical skill and ingenuity in battle – yet another example of the plucky underdog spirit and ability to triumph against the odds that future British forces would demonstrate in the future.

English

TROOPS 6,000-9,000

LONGBOWMEN 5,000

KNIGHTS 1,000



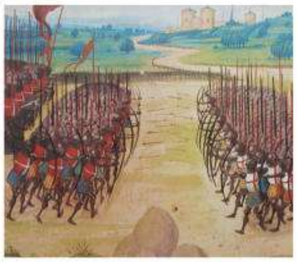
KING HENRY V

LEADER

King Henry was a skilled battle commander, leading his troops into battle and fighting alongside them.

Strengths Brave and experienced military leader.

Weaknesses His forces were numerically inferior to those of the French.



LONGBOWMAN

KEY UNIT

The effectiveness of the English longbowmen played a massive part in the success of the battle.

Strengths Long range and difficult to attack.

Weaknesses Relatively poorly armoured and vulnerable if attacked.

LONGBOW

KEY WEAPON

The longbow's six arrows per minute could wound at 360m (1,200ft), kill at 180m (600ft) and even penetrate armour at 90m (300ft).

Strengths Accurate and destructive in large numbers.

Weaknesses Finite number of arrows available to them.

01 Camping for the night

On 24 October, about 48 kilometres (30 miles) from Calais in the town of Frévent, English scouts reported an immense French army blocking the road ahead. Seeing that they could not pass without meeting them in battle, Henry ordered his forces to camp there for the night.

02 Taking their positions

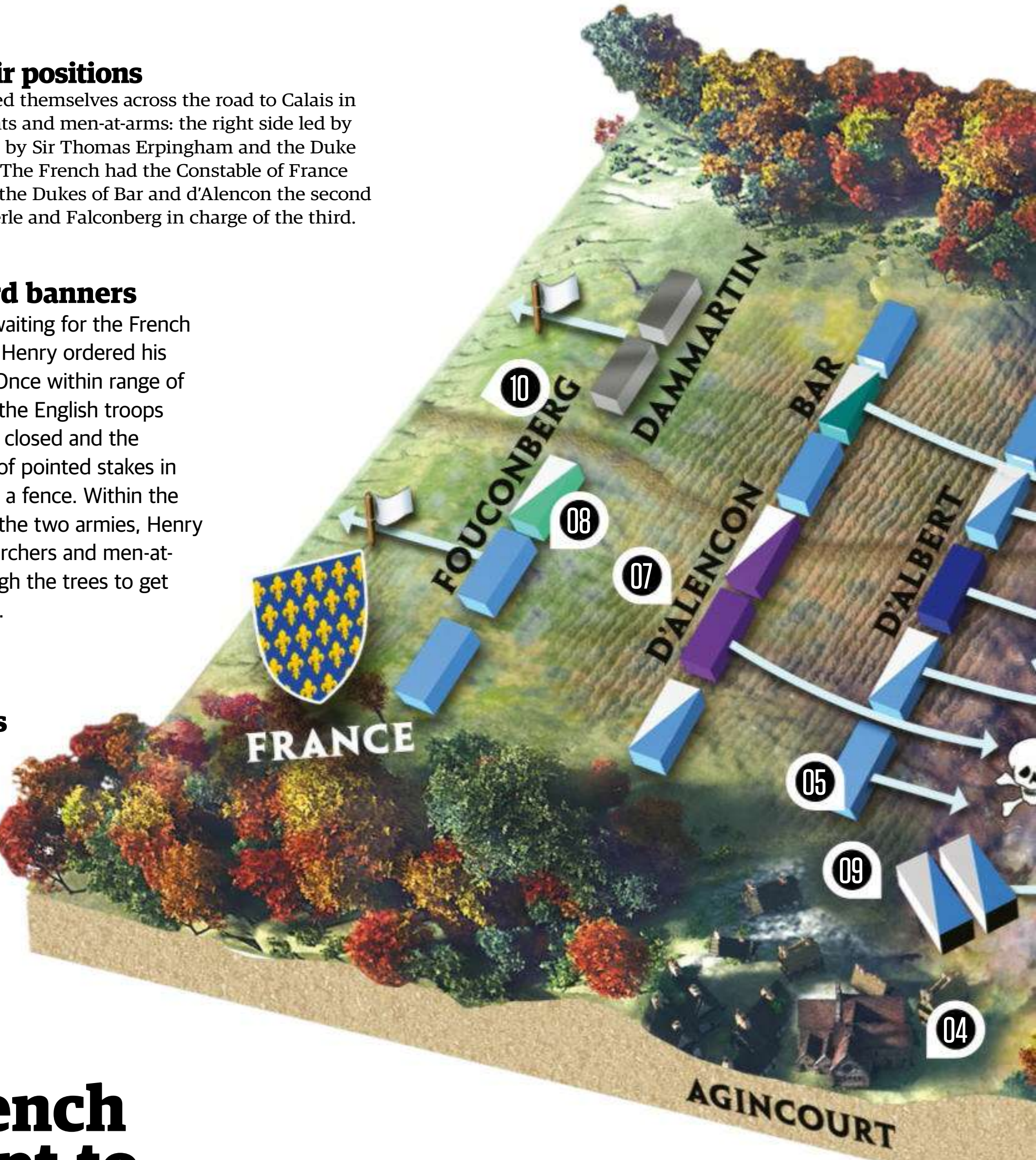
The English positioned themselves across the road to Calais in three groups of knights and men-at-arms: the right side led by Lord Camoys, the left by Sir Thomas Erpingham and the Duke of York in the centre. The French had the Constable of France leading the first line, the Dukes of Bar and d'Alencon the second and the Counts of Merle and Falconberg in charge of the third.

03 Forward banners

Bored of waiting for the French to begin the attack, Henry ordered his troops to advance. Once within range of the French archers, the English troops halted, the divisions closed and the archers set a series of pointed stakes in the ground, forming a fence. Within the woods surrounding the two armies, Henry directed groups of archers and men-at-arms to move through the trees to get closer to the French.

04 Arrows away

Shortly after, Henry gave the order for his archers to shoot the French, who were massed together in a big, unwieldy group. Taken by surprise, the French forces incurred very heavy casualties.



05 French attempt to move forward

After the shock of this assault, the French forces tried to advance in order to take the battle to the English. However, having already suffered massive casualties, they were impeded by the dead and dying horses and men already shot down in front of them. Reduced to walking pace, they were easily picked off by the English archers concealed in the woodlands on the flanks.

06 Archers join the fray and flanks

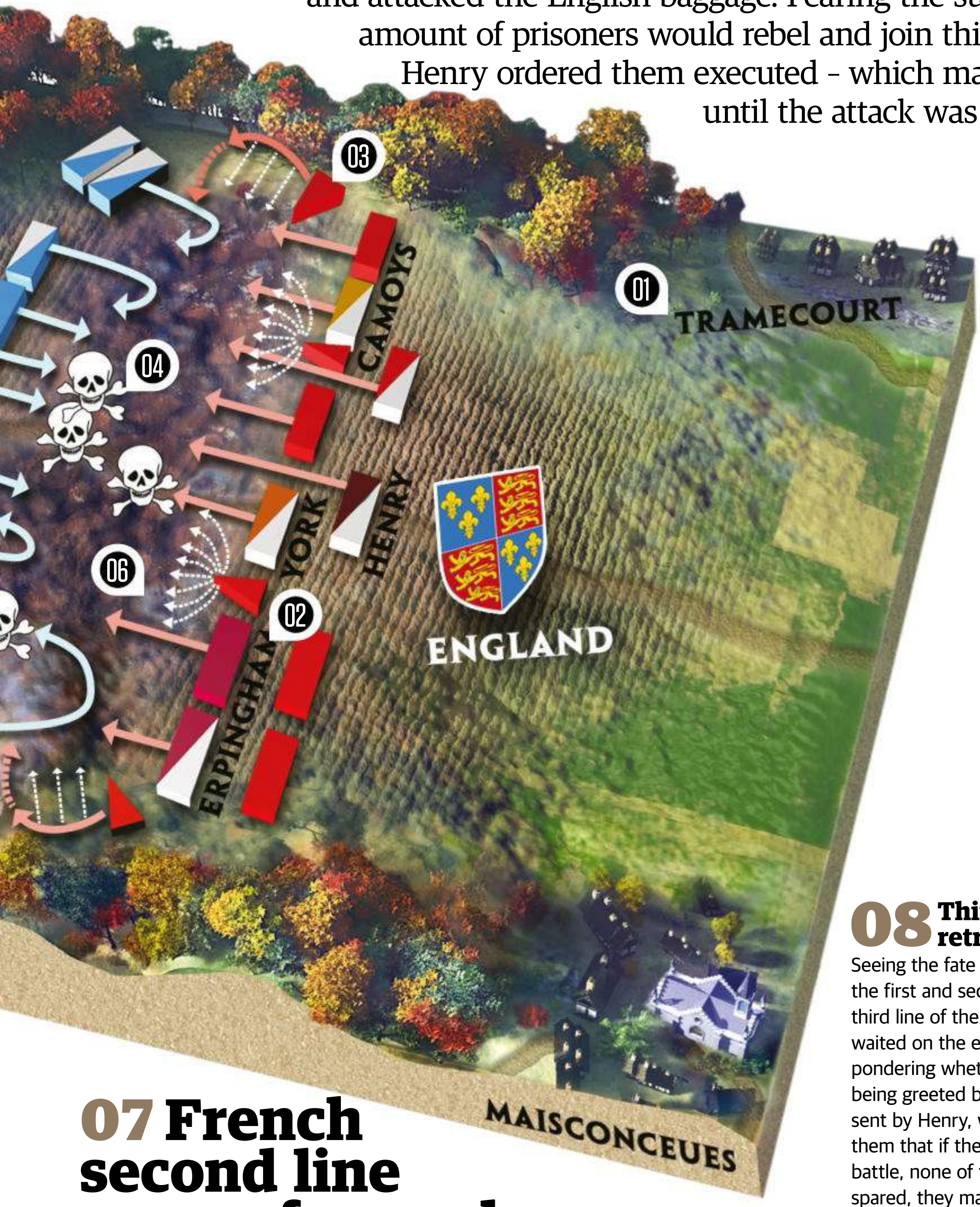
With the battle continuing along the fence of stakes, the English archers abandoned their positions and joined the knights in fighting against the French cavalry forces – most of which had been forced to dismount – which were reinforced by soldiers attacking on the flanks.

10 French camp ransacked

With the battle over and any local resistance crushed, the English troops ransacked the largely abandoned French camp, having secured a victory that would live on in legend.

09 Local French force attacks baggage

Although the main battle was over, it threatened to reignite when a local French force circumvented the forest and attacked the English baggage. Fearing the substantial amount of prisoners would rebel and join this assault, Henry ordered them executed – which many were, until the attack was repelled.



07 French second line moves forward

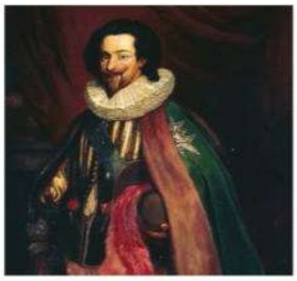
The French second line, led by D'Alencon, moved forward in earnest to assist the beleaguered first line, but was overwhelmed in a similar fashion. Seeing the futility in continuing, he attempted to surrender to Henry, but was killed before he could reach the king.

08 Third line retreats

Seeing the fate that had met the first and second waves, the third line of the French forces waited on the edge of the field, pondering whether to join. After being greeted by a messenger sent by Henry, who informed them that if they joined the battle, none of them would be spared, they made their decision. Unsurprisingly, considering their options, they left the battlefield.

France

TROOPS	36,000
CAVALRY	1,200
KNIGHTS	8,800



CHARLES D'ALBRET

LEADER

The former Constable of France co-commanded the French army alongside Jean le Maingre.
Strengths Experienced soldier.
Weaknesses Low social rank, so orders were ignored by noblemen.

KNIGHTS

KEY UNIT

Much of the French forces consisted of heavy infantry, making them tough adversaries in open combat.
Strengths Heavily armoured and effective at hand-to-hand fighting.
Weaknesses Slow, cumbersome and easy to pick off by archers.

HORSES

KEY WEAPON

Large numbers of knights on horseback often presented a fearful sight for their opponents.
Strengths Fast and powerful opponents in battle.
Weaknesses Cramped and boggy locations made them useless.

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BATTLE OF BOSWORTH

BOSWORTH, ENGLAND 22 AUGUST 1485

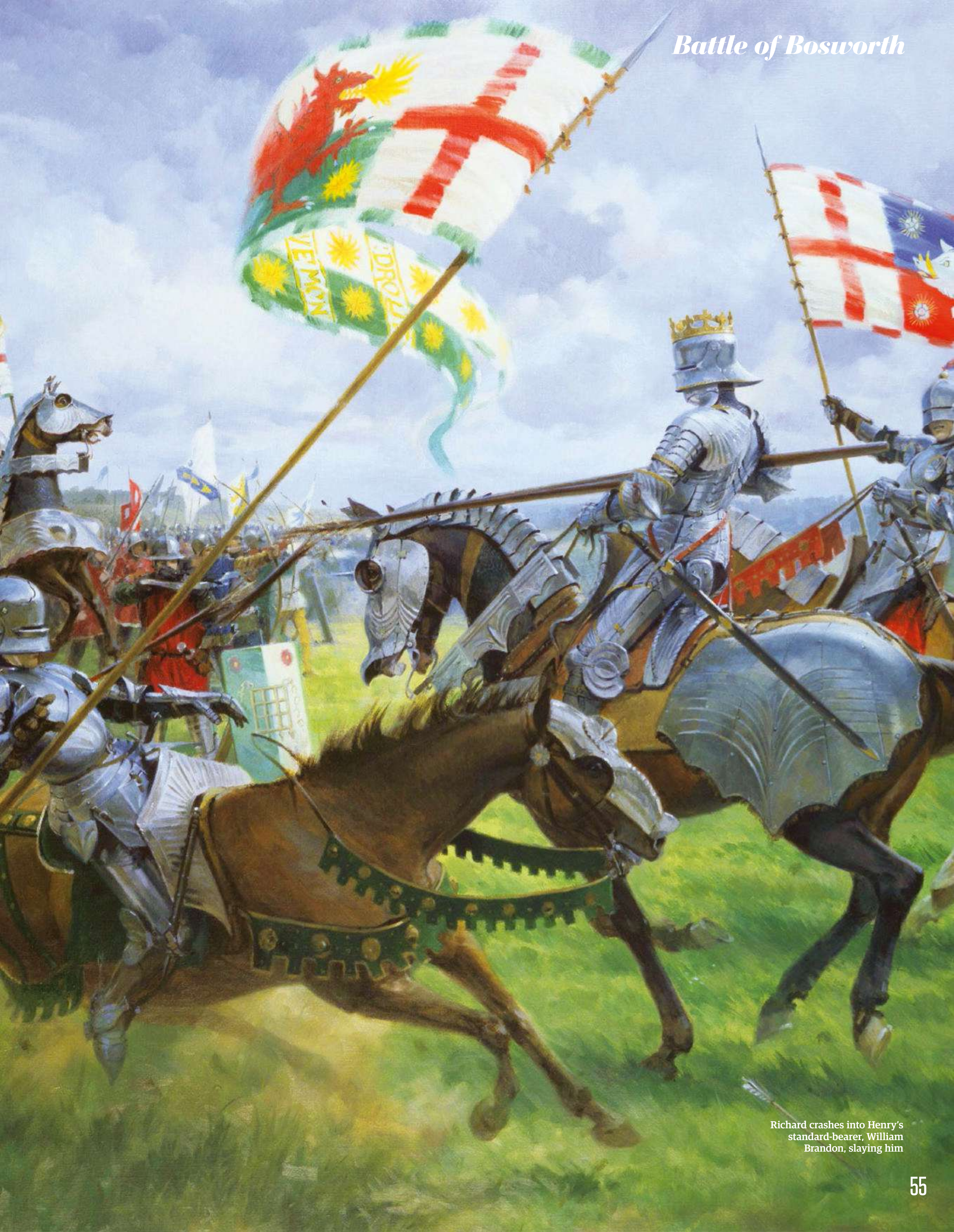
The morning, summer sun was still low in the sky as archers, billmen, swordsmen and knights formed into ranks, the anxious whinnying of their horses mingling with the clatter of armour and arms. The year was 1485, and on this day, 22 August, the future of the British Isles would be decided forever; decided with the blood of a thousand or more English, Welsh and French lives.

Casting his eye over the scene, and the opposing force come to meet him, Henry Tudor, Earl of Richmond, could see the standard of his rival fluttering in the wind – the white boar of Richard Plantagenet, one of the last remaining sons of York, who stands not just between him and the route to London, but crucially the English throne. Peering purposefully across the spacious divide separating the two armies, Richard in turn was able to spot Henry's standard – the red dragon of Wales. If he could win the day, he would secure his legitimacy as king and send a message to any other pretenders and traitors.

The hatred between Richard's family and their rival for the crown of England, the House of Lancaster, has been raging on and off the battlefield for decades in the bitter civil struggles known as the Cousins' War. Tearing the country in two, the previous battles of St Albans, Towton, Barnet, Tewkesbury and others had seen horrific slaughter, but had not bought a lasting peace and a decisive end to the struggle. The Wars of the Roses, as we know them today, would come to a final end on the field of Bosworth.

After the death of Richard's older brother, the Yorkist king Edward IV, and then the untimely and mysterious passing of his 13 year old nephew after just two-month-long reign, Edward V, the political cogs of the English nobility sprung into action again after some 12 years of relative peace. With Richard taking the throne for himself in 1483, there were many who questioned their own loyalty. The chief of those rising up against Richard's usurpation was Henry Stafford, the Duke of Buckingham, who led a rebellion against the new king. Meanwhile the Lancastrian would-be heir to the throne, Henry Tudor, had sat exiled in France, under the protection of Francis II Duke of Brittany, for 14 years. His passage across the channel to join up with the rebels was hampered by storms and he was forced to return to Brittany, while the uprising in his name was crushed and the Duke of Buckingham beheaded.

Two years later, Henry made the journey to take the throne once again, this time successfully landing in his native Wales, in Milford Haven. He quickly managed to drum up substantial support for his claim and his army, bringing with him a few English knights and a host of Welsh fighters sympathetic to his cause. In addition, he had brought around 1,500 French mercenaries, courtesy of his French host who was keen to influence events over the channel. However, the king would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DROIT

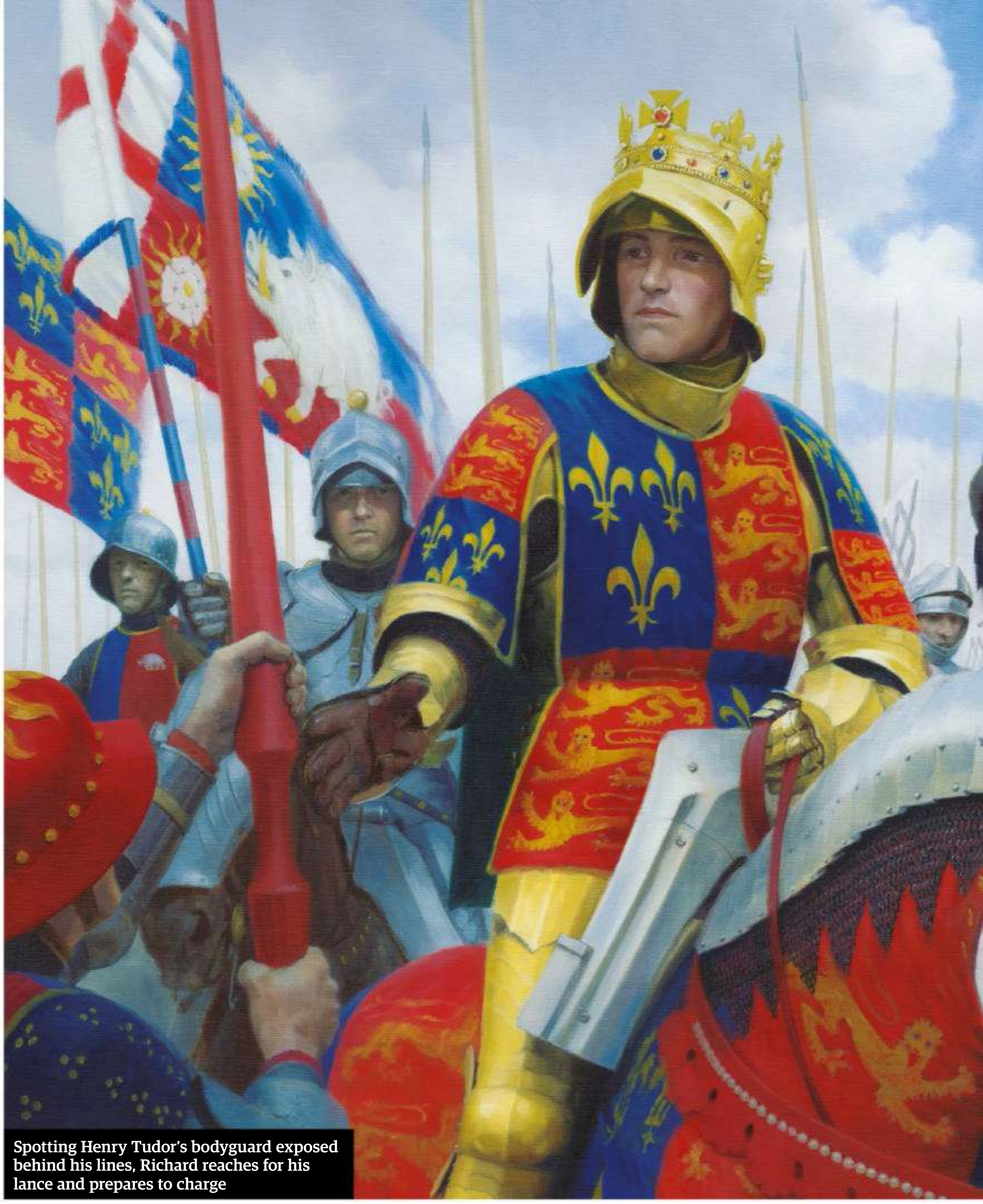
Richard crashes into Henry's standard-bearer, William Brandon, slaying him still be able to call upon far more noble houses and their levies to line up against him.

Just over 100 miles from London, Bosworth Field lies between the hamlet of Shenton and the village of Sutton Cheney. Arriving first to cut off Henry's advance towards the capital, Richard chose to camp close to Ambion Hill, giving him a commanding view of the southern approach, where he knew his artillery could be brought to fire down on the enemy. At the bottom of the hill lay a large expanse of boggy marshland, which it would be difficult for the Lancastrian infantry and cavalry to cross. His army would be split into three separate sections, or 'battles'; the main force, or vanguard, under the command of the Earl of Norfolk was positioned on the right flank, Richard would command a smaller force mainly consisting of his household cavalry slightly to the rear and centre, while the Earl of Northumberland commanded his own men on the left flank.

Henry's force had spent the night further to the south-west, at White Moors. Myth and fiction recalls that Richard spent a sleepless night hampered by nightmares, but whether this is true or not, the king's forces would have been well prepared for the rebels marching from the south. The king himself was a worthy soldier, the veteran of several battles and rebellions during the long war. Henry, on the other hand, had never seen battle, and had spent much of his adult life cooped up in France. For this reason, much of the strategic decisions, as well as direct control of the army was given to the Duke of Oxford, one of Henry's allies and a fierce enemy of the Yorkists.

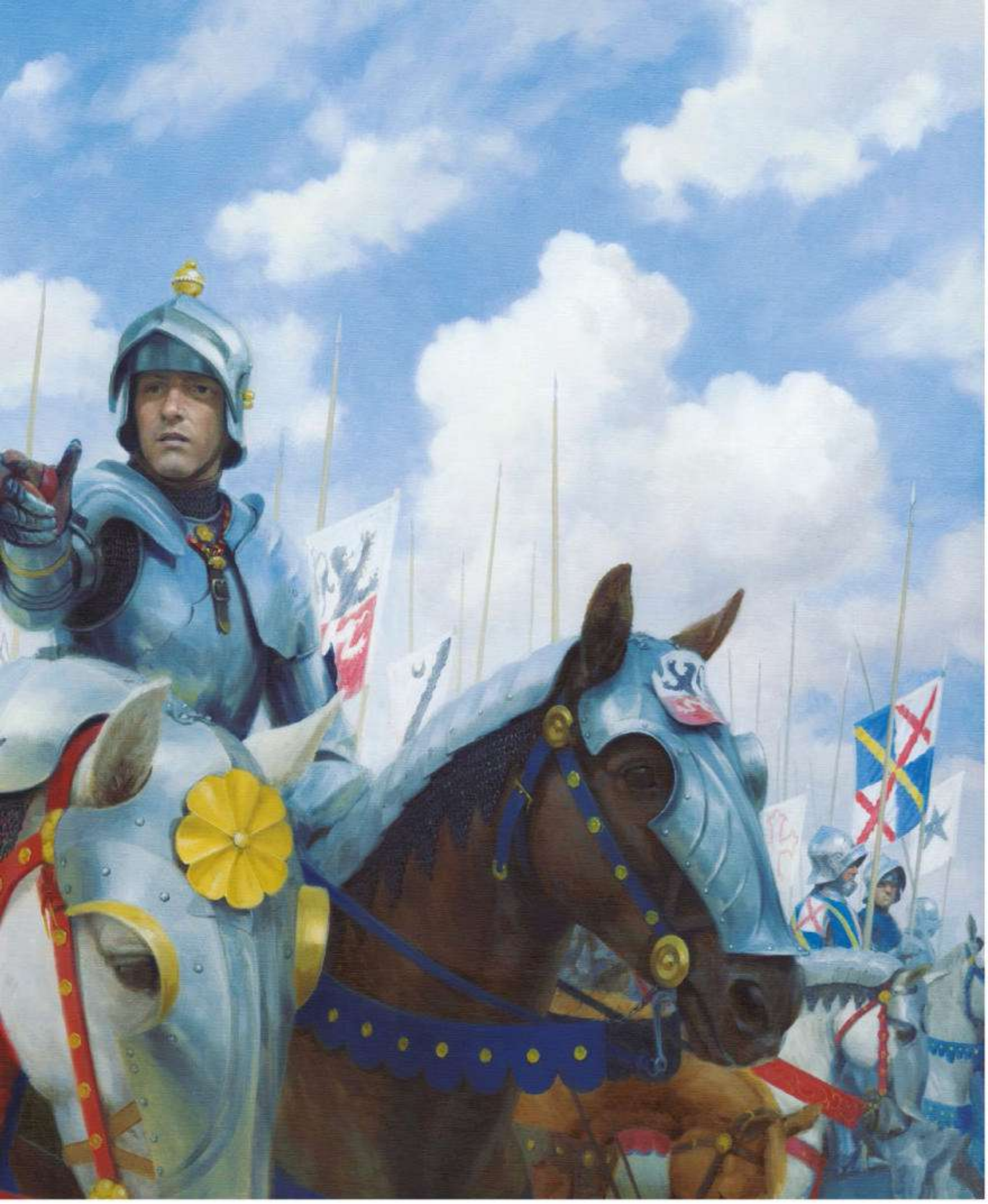
However, there was one other major factor that had the capacity to tip the coming collision of steel in either direction – the Stanley family. Seemingly staunch supporters of Richard's cause even before he took the throne, both Sir William and Lord Thomas Stanley, the first Earl of Derby, had been rewarded well for their loyalty to the crown. William was made the Chief Justice of North Wales, while Thomas was made Constable of England, both powerful positions. Ominously for Richard's cause, however, Thomas Stanley was married to Henry Tudor's mother, Margaret Beaufort, who was a key conspirator in bringing her son to England and to the throne. On the day of the battle, both Stanley brothers had arrived, each with a contingent of men, and each with a mind to choose the victor for himself.

As with many of the clashes of the period, kings and commanders very often lead from the front, embroiling themselves in the thick of the fight to bolster the resolve of their men, as well as to crush the will of the enemy. The clash at Bosworth


Spotting Henry Tudor's bodyguard exposed behind his lines, Richard reaches for his lance and prepares to charge

Bosworth Battlefield as it looks today

> "The king himself was a worthy soldier, the veteran of several battles and rebellions during the long war. Henry, on the other hand, had never seen battle"



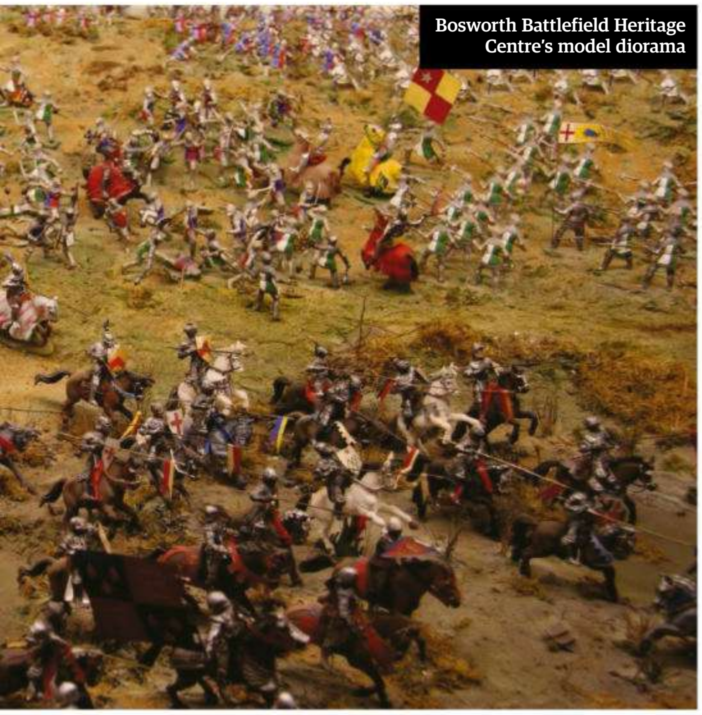
Field was a test for the mettle of not only the ordinary soldiers, but also the ability of their noble commanders to lead and fight.

Fire from the hill

Rendezvousing close to Watling Street, Henry's army began the march along the Roman Road towards Richard's position, with the Stanley force following from the south-east still uncommitted to the fight. Suddenly, with his men around 1,000 yards from the king's position, the hilltop ahead erupted with canon fire as the royal artillery let off a volley at the rebels. With his battle line spread wide to envelop the advancing troops, Richard wanted his guns to soften up the rebel infantry before encasing them in a swift flanking move. Sensing the danger attacking this position head-on could pose, Oxford decided to wheel his forces around and turned to the king's right flank, the vanguard, commanded by the Earl of Norfolk. By keeping the substantial marshland on his right, Oxford knew he was relatively protected from any flanking move from Northumberland or the king, and he even had an opportunity to send Richard's force into disarray.

Seeing the rebel units emerge in the distance, and his guns open up on them, Richard remained as confident as ever. Not only did it soon become apparent that the enemy had no artillery to answer with, but with Stanley still uncommitted there were also far fewer of the rebels. The men on the hill, a majority of whom were English, not only saw the opposing force as traitorous rebels, but invading foreigners. With an army of French and Welsh coming to wipe them out, English honour, as well as the English throne, was at stake. Richard ordered Norfolk to attack.

As the rebels drew within range, the archers at the front of Norfolk's vanguard drew their bows and



Bosworth Battlefield Heritage Centre's model diorama

	Yorkists	Lancastrians	The Stanleys
TROOPS	10-15,000	5,000	5-8,000
CAVALRY	1,500	C.200	UNKNOWN
LOSSES	1,000	100	UNKNOWN
LEADERS	KING RICHARD III, EARL OF NORTHUMBERLAND, EARL OF NORFOLK	HENRY TUDOR EARL OF RICHMOND, DUKE OF OXFORD	BARON THOMAS STANLEY, EARL OF DERBY; SIR WILLIAM STANLEY, CHIEF JUSTICE OF NORTH WALES
GAME CHANGERS	Richard's abilities as a commander and a soldier far outweighed Henry's, his age and experience were vastly greater than his rivals. and his unit of artillery would be able to pummel the enemy without any real strength.	The Duke of Oxford's military experience and intuition were crucial to Henry Tudor's army, plus unlike Richard his entire force was committed to him and his cause. Sir William Stanley, Henry's step-father's brother, had already changed sides to become a support of the Lancastrian effort.	Positioned separately from the other two armies, the Stanley family were perfectly placed to strike whom and when they chose.

unleashed a hail of arrows into the enemy infantry. Often the staple of 15th-century English armies, the bow was a deadly effective weapon, used to win the fight before a bloody hand-to-hand melee could even begin. While Norfolk's bows had the advantage of the high ground to rely on, Henry's Welsh recruits also had longbows with them, giving the royal force a volley or two of raining death before the meatgrinder of medieval metal could whirl into action. With shrieks of French, bellows of Welsh and shouts of English filling the air in an almighty roar, the two sides clattered into each other.

The late-medieval melee was a messy affair, with commoner and noblemen alike in the thick of it together. Billmen, with their long, heavy poleaxes, roamed the field in search of armoured targets, mounted or not, to knock to the floor and dispatch. The hooked blades they wielded were ideal for catching on suits of steel, unbalancing the wearer and bringing them down. The unfortunate victim could then usually live long enough to see his attacker looting anything of value, before quickly moving on.

Charging into the fight on either side, Norfolk's vanguard cavalry would have had a crushing initial impact on the enemy, likely clashing with the opposing cavalry deployed to meet them. Once they entered into the thick of the fighting, however, mounted knights became giant armoured targets for any manner or billmen, archer, or rival knight to claim as a prize. Initially rattled by Norfolk's charge, Oxford's men soon were able to form into a wedge formation, gathering together to weather the Yorkist attacks.

The king gambles

Then disaster struck for Richard. Despite his advanced years (he was at least 60 at the time - a considerable age for medieval combat), the Duke of Norfolk had been fighting in the thick of the melee in the royal vanguard alongside his son, the Earl of Surrey. Leading Henry's own vanguard, the Earl of Oxford sought Norfolk out in the field for single combat and knocked the duke's helmet from his head in a flurry of blows. Either by extreme misfortune or a carefully-placed shot, Norfolk was then fatally wounded by an arrow to the face, dying almost instantly. His son, Surrey, was also wounded in the fray and taken by Henry's men.

With Richard's advantage of the hill compromised by Oxford's manoeuvre, and his guns now out of position to prove effective, the situation was looking far less favourable. The fighting begun on his right flank had undermined his broad line,

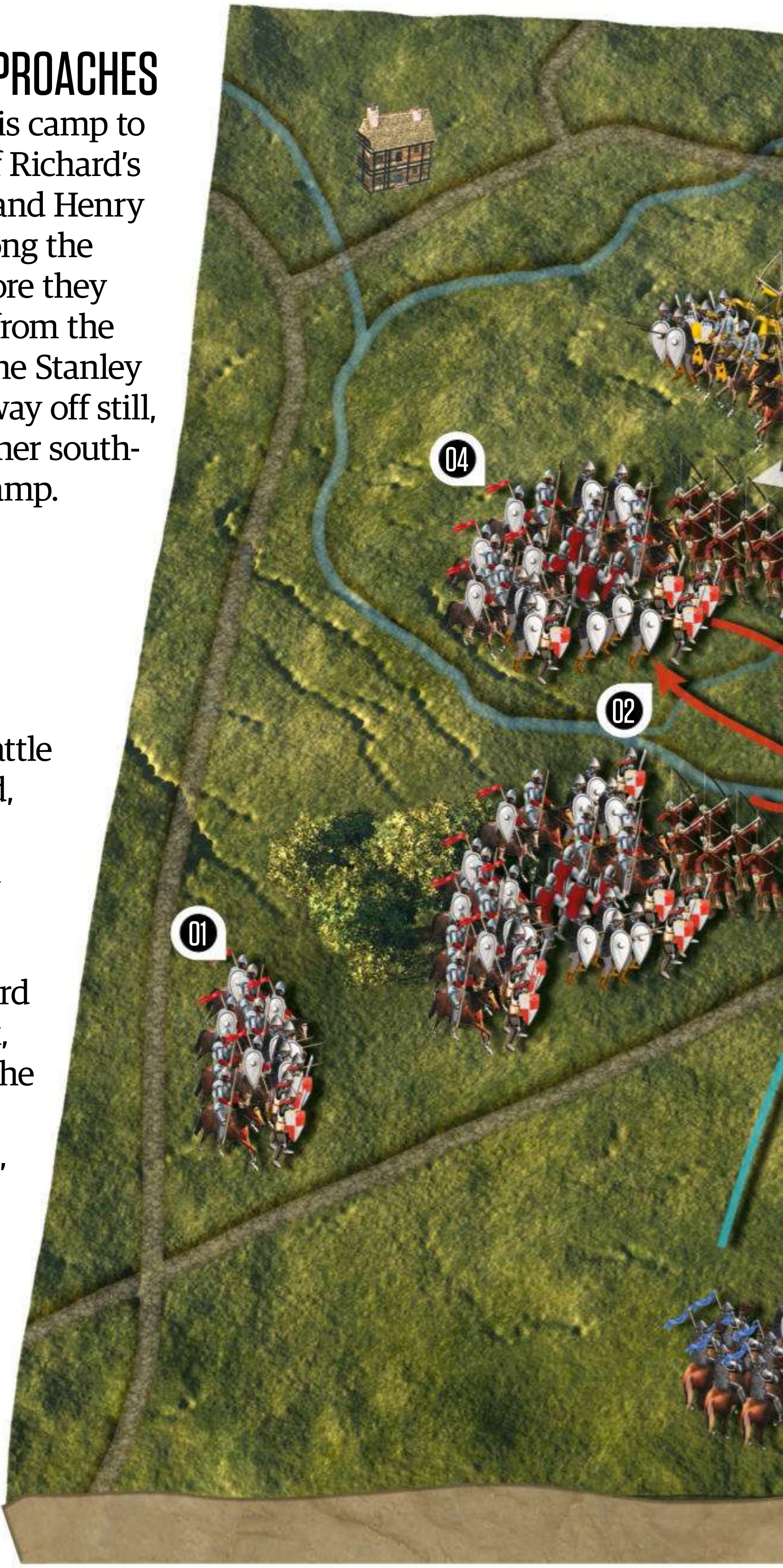
> "With shrieks of French, bellows of Welsh and shouts of English filling the air in an almighty roar, the two sides clattered into each other"

01 HENRY APPROACHES

Marching from his camp to the south-west of Richard's position, Oxford and Henry lead the army along the Roman road, before they come under fire from the king's artillery. The Stanley forces are some way off still, approaching further south-east from their camp.

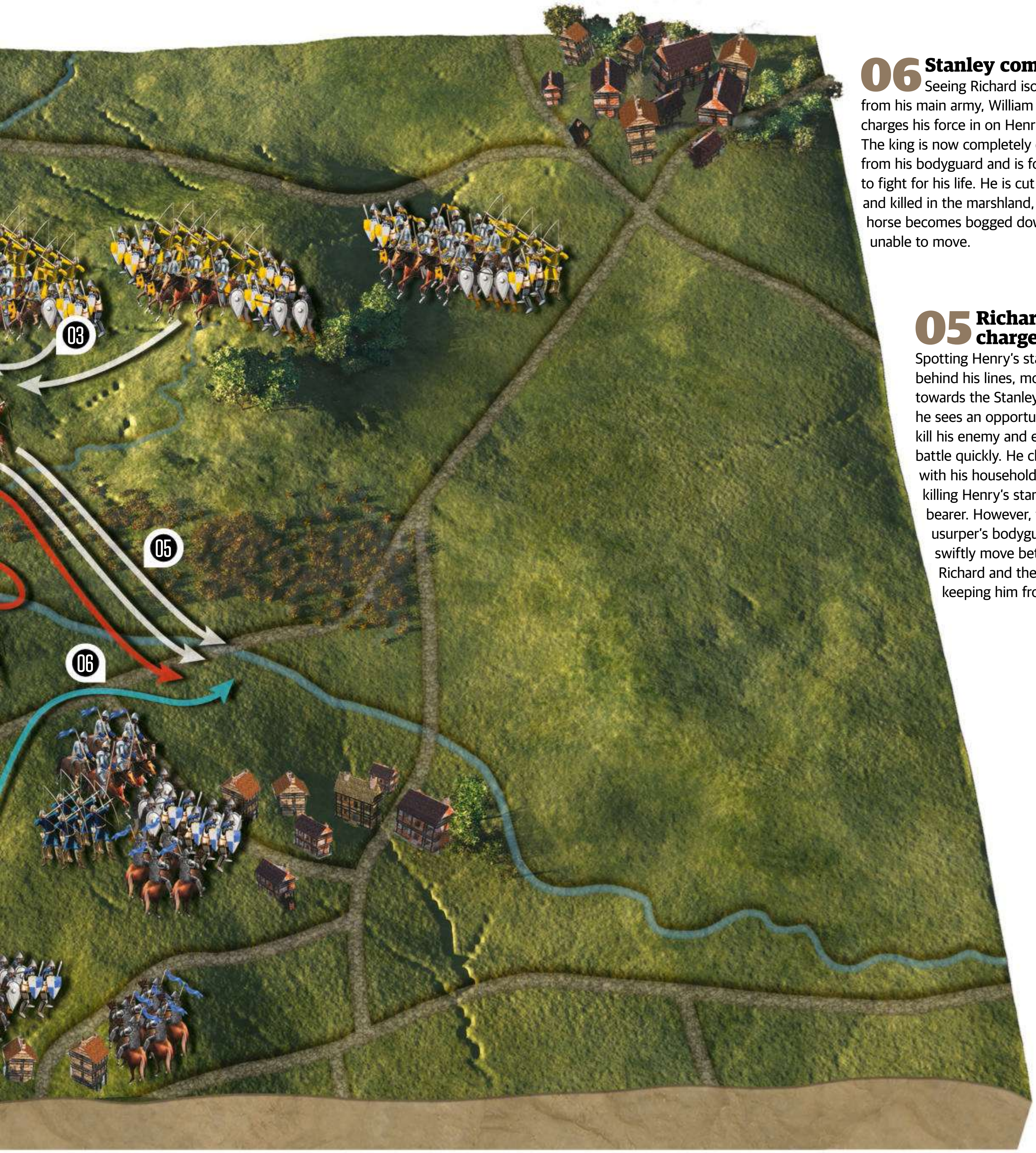
02 OXFORD MANOEUVRES

With Richard's battle line now revealed, Oxford decides to wheel his men back and around, moving towards Richard's vanguard on his right flank, commanded by the Duke of Norfolk. Seeing this move, Richard orders Norfolk to attack.



03 The melee begins

Charging from its advantage on the hill, Norfolk's vanguard initially causes Oxford's troops to falter. The rebel force soon gathers itself into a wedge formation, banding together to weather the onslaught from the king's archers and knights. Henry remains with his small bodyguard force, to the rear of the fighting.



06 Stanley commits

Seeing Richard isolated from his main army, William Stanley charges his force in on Henry's side. The king is now completely cut off from his bodyguard and is forced to fight for his life. He is cut down and killed in the marshland, after his horse becomes bogged down and unable to move.

05 Richard charges

Spotting Henry's standard behind his lines, moving towards the Stanley forces, he sees an opportunity to kill his enemy and end the battle quickly. He charges with his household cavalry, killing Henry's standard-bearer. However, the young usurper's bodyguards swiftly move between Richard and their lord, keeping him from harm.

04 NORFOLK IS SLAIN

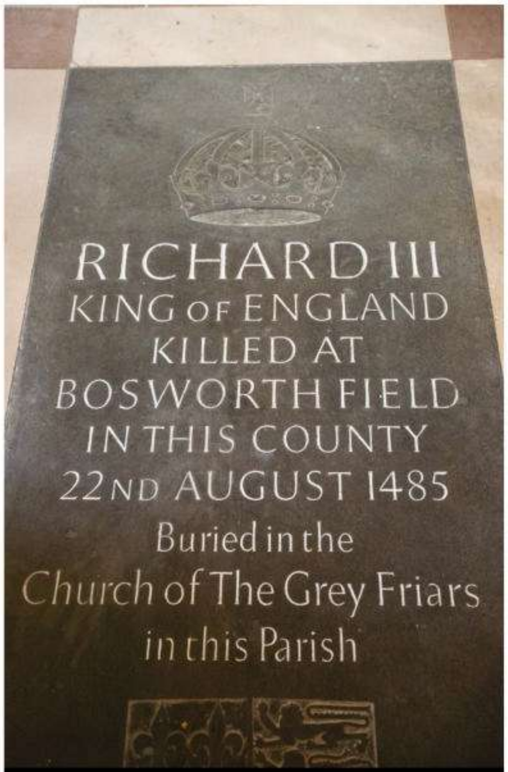
With his helmet smashed away from his head by the Earl of Oxford, the Duke of Norfolk is fatally wounded by an arrow. News of his death disheartens the Yorkist force, as well as the king, the duke's patron.

and the marshland to the front of his position prevented any flanking by his own force. Worse, whether through treachery or a breakdown in communication, the Earl of Northumberland had failed to respond to earlier commands for his men to join the fight. Worse still, the Stanley army still sat uncommitted between the two forces, threatening each with its interference. Now with Norfolk gone, the battle was slipping out of Richard's grasp.

At this point, it's possible that several of the king's close allies began to turn on him. One account derives from a Spanish adventurer, Juan de Salazar, who was fighting by Richard's side at Bosworth. Seeing several of Richard's units turn their backs to the enemy, he warned the king to "take steps to put your person in safety". In reply, Richard retorted: "Salazar, God forbid I yield one step. This day I will die as a king or win." Certainly, from what we know next, Richard was a seasoned and daring soldier, with no intention of yielding.

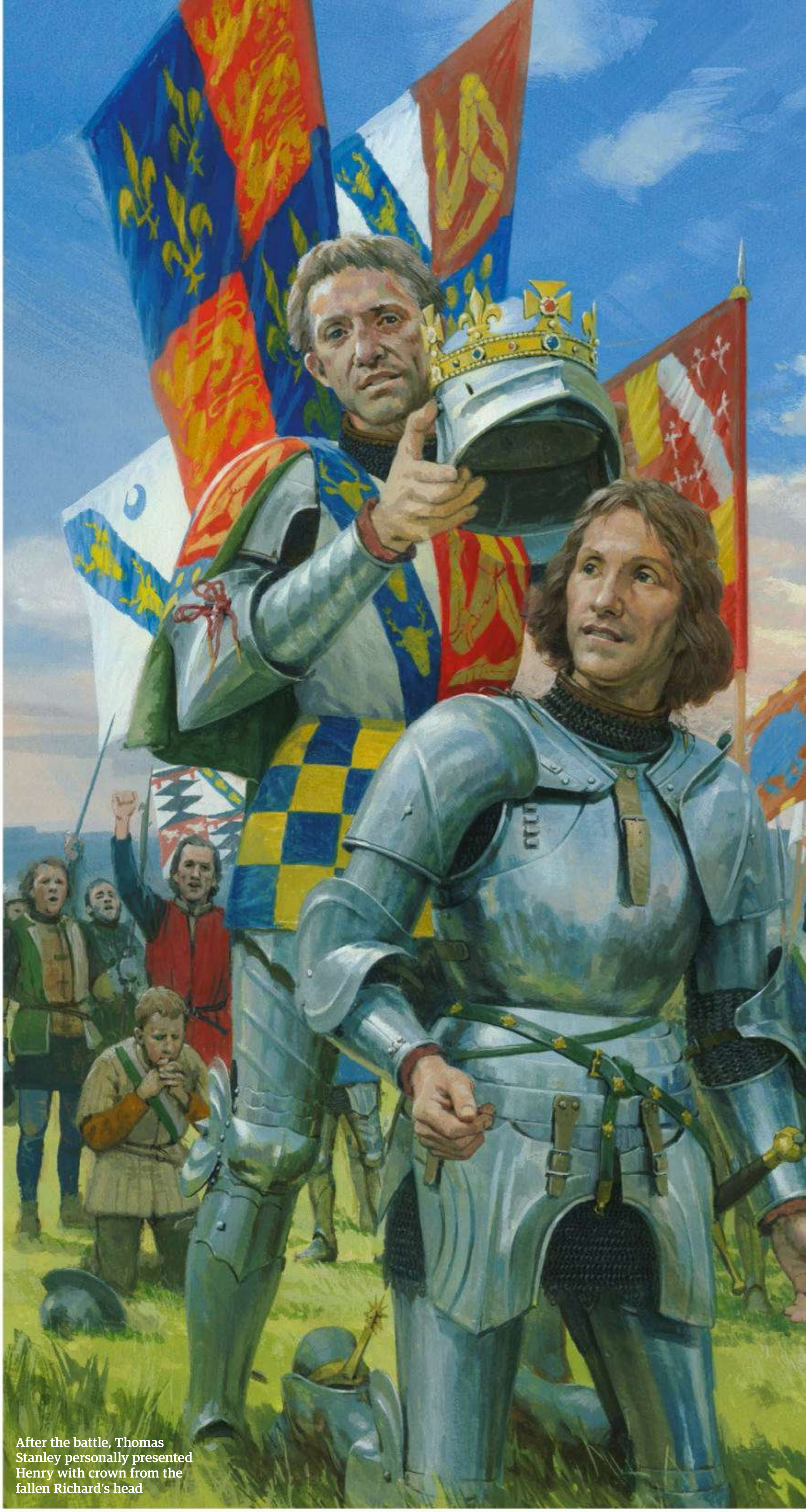
In an attempt to force the Stanleys into the fight, Henry had set off towards their force to personally bring them into the battle. Spotting the red dragon standard move off from the rear of the fighting, Richard spurred on his horse and called his household cavalry to charge. Determined to take the fight to the usurper, he was resolved to end the battle and the rebellion with one devastating attack to kill Henry Tudor.

Taken by surprise, Henry's small bodyguard unit had to rush to place themselves between Richard's onslaught and their leader. Though the battle-hardened Plantagenet managed to cut down

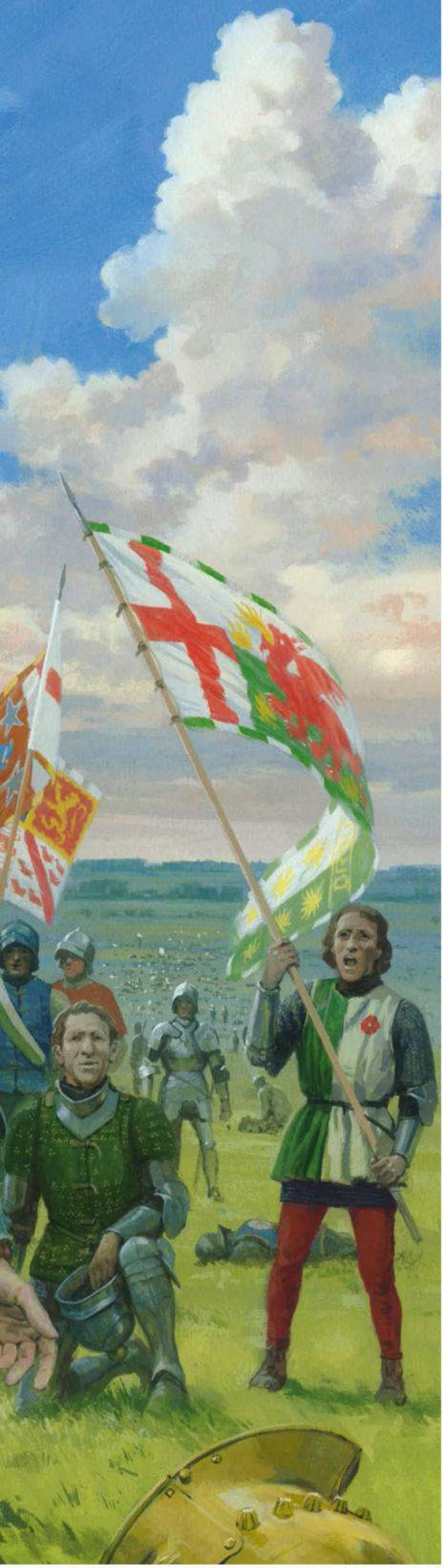


RICHARD III
KING OF ENGLAND
KILLED AT
BOSWORTH FIELD
IN THIS COUNTY
22ND AUGUST 1485
Buried in the
Church of The Grey Friars
in this Parish

As Richard's remains were left undiscovered for hundreds of years, only a simple memorial was created in Leicester Cathedral in his name



After the battle, Thomas Stanley personally presented Henry with crown from the fallen Richard's head



King Richard's Well is where Richard III is reputed to have drunk before the Battle of Bosworth; the present cairn was restored in 1964

> "William Stanley, the new king's saviour in the battle, would be executed in 1495 for treason, having conspired to support yet another usurper to the throne"

his foe's standard-bearer, William Brandon, who had been holding aloft Henry's red dragon sigil all morning, he could not reach the young Tudor.

It was at this crucial moment, with the personal guard of both Tudor and Plantagenet embroiled in hand-to-hand fighting, that Sir William Stanley, the younger brother, committed his men – on Henry's side. As the fresh troops rushed into the fray, Richard must have known his cause was lost. Soon he became cut off from his bodyguard and his horse became stuck in the marshland as he tried to escape the charging Stanley troops. The king stood alone.

The last Plantagenet falls

Modern scans of Richard's recently-recovered remains have indicated the king was wounded at least 11 times, twice fatally in the head, by the tip of a blade, or the thrust of a poleaxe. Surrounded by enemies, but still fighting to his last, he was left fending off attacks from any and every angle, before one put him down flat in the wet marsh, never to get up again. The crown circlet placed over his helmet, which was likely smashed away from his head prior to his fatal wound, was later retrieved and taken to Henry by none other than Lord Thomas Stanley – who placed the crown on Henry's head.

After the battle, Richard's corpse was stripped naked, slumped onto a horse, and led triumphantly into Leicester by Henry and his men. On its journey, exposed to the victorious Tudor army, Richard's body received further humiliation, including one stabbing wound to his buttock. Once in Leicester, the dead king was kept on display – possibly mourned as well as gloated over – and witnessed so that the message would spread through Europe that Richard III was dead.

Henry VII would have to fight for his crown several more times during his reign, and stave off insurrections even from his closest allies at the Battle of Bosworth. William Stanley, the new king's saviour in the battle, would be executed in 1495 for treason, having conspired to support yet another usurper to the throne.

When the body of the last Plantagenet king was initially put to rest, he was squeezed into a grave too small for him and without a coffin, it being dug hastily by Franciscan friars, and was left with no significant marker or epitaph. It was lost for the next 500 years, before being uncovered beneath a carpark in Leicester in 2013. In 2015 it was reinterred in a tomb in Leicester Cathedral, after holy Catholic mass was held to pray for the dead king's soul, as well as all those who lost their lives at Bosworth Field.

© Graham Turner/Studio 88; Alamy; Nicolle Fuller/Sayo Studio

BATTLE OF SEKIGAHARA

SEKIGAHARA, JAPAN 21 OCTOBER 1600

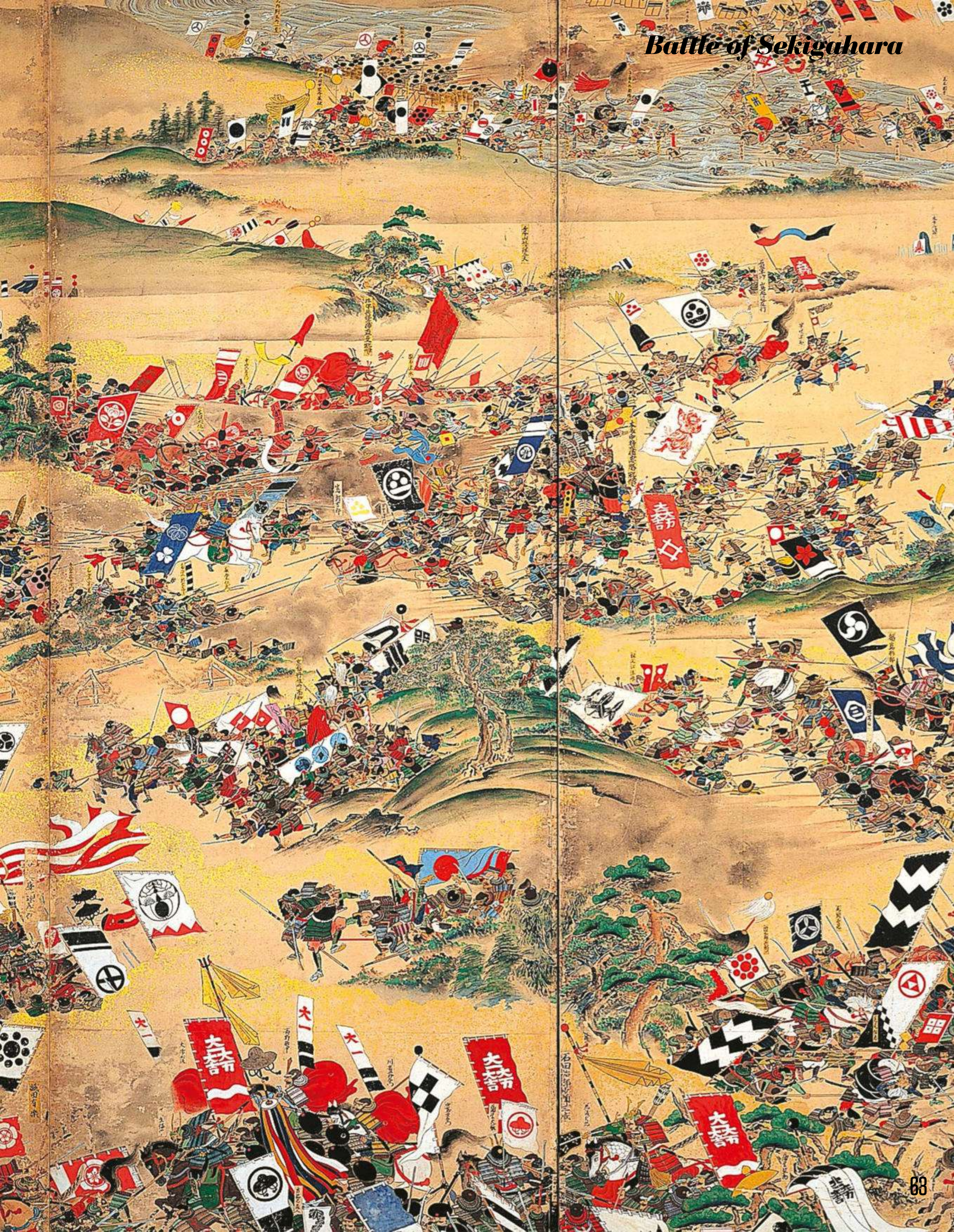
By the end of the 16th century, Oda Nobunaga had changed Japan forever. The samurai warlord had conquered his way across the country, taking control of the fractured military fiefdoms one by one. Slowly but surely Nobunaga's bloody campaign led to the unification of a third of Japan, forming a mighty land far removed from the warring states that had existed before it. However, a swift and shocking end was put to this unification when his own samurai general, Akechi Mitsuhide betrayed him and the warlord was forced to commit ritual suicide, or seppuku.

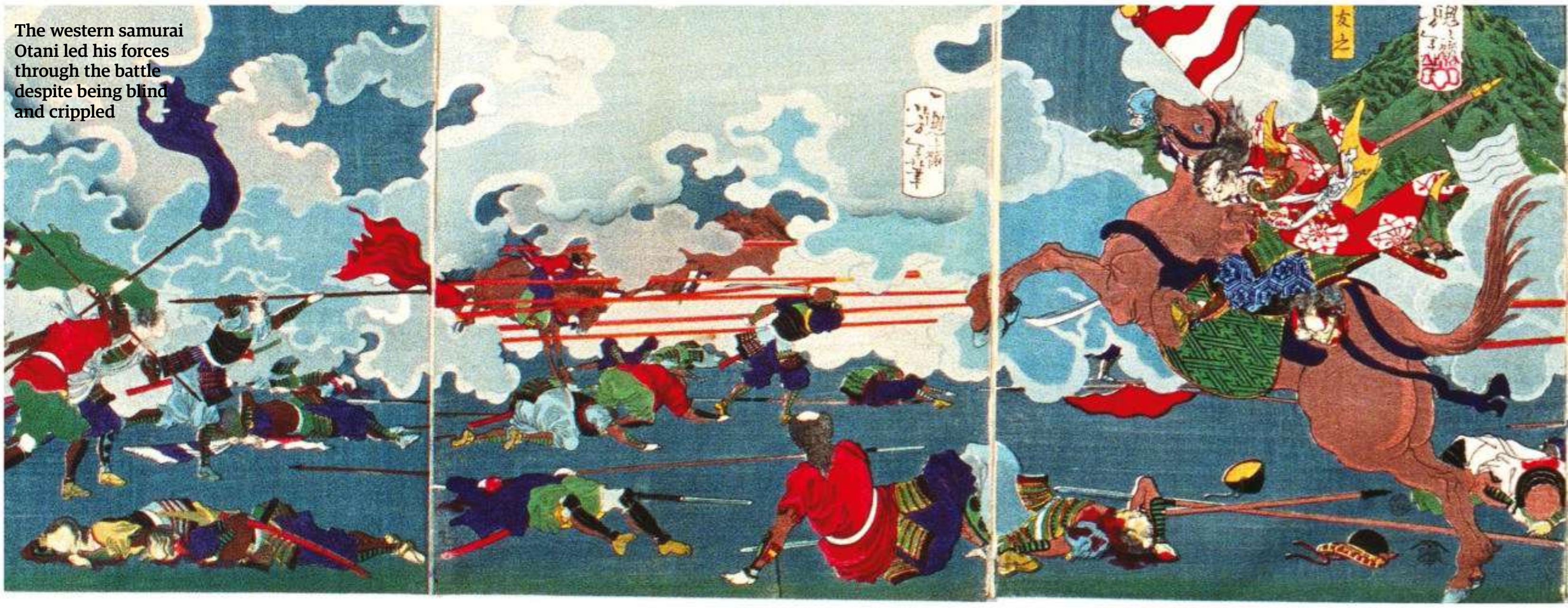
However, Mitsuhide would not rule for long. Nobunaga's loyal vassal, Toyotomi Hideyoshi, vowed to avenge his master and faced the usurper in battle – forcing him to flee just two hours after the fighting began at Yamazaki. Mitsuhide's reign as shogun had lasted only 13 days. The man who had defeated him, Toyotomi, came from only humble beginnings. Not the son of a samurai or a daimyo, (a feudal lord), he was peasant-born and was given no surname at birth. Nevertheless, Toyotomi was fiercely loyal to his master and continued the work of unifying the warring states of the country. He steadily consolidated power until his death in 1598, leaving his clan to take control of the ever-growing and powerful Japanese nation.

Many didn't like the idea of being ruled by a previously peasant clan, and Toyotomi's failed invasions of Korea also cast doubts over its power. With the ruling clan's right to reign in doubt, a huge power vacuum formed in the Japanese government, and one man in particular was very keen to fill it. Tokugawa Ieyasu, unlike Toyotomi, had a privileged background and was born to rule. His father had been a daimyo and his mother the daughter of a samurai lord – noble blood pulsed through his veins. He had been surrounded by war and death since the day he was born and he believed with every fibre of his being that he was the right person to rule the united land. He had caused unrest previously by pledging his allegiance to Oda Nobukatsu, the heir of Oda Nobunaga opposed to Toyotomi, and he decided to rise up against the same family once more. For two years he plotted, schemed and persuaded various daimyo to side with him against the Toyotomi clan. With perfect timing for Tokugawa, the oldest and most respected of the Toyotomi regents died, so the ambitious lord made his move. He took over Osaka castle, the residence of the young Hideyori, son of Toyotomi, in a brutal and obvious snatch for power.

Ishida Mitsunari stood as the main opposition to Tokugawa's aggression. This powerful daimyo had a long history with Toyotomi; as well as fighting side by side with the ruler, he was also a top administrator of the regime. A man of rigid character with a calculating brain, Mitsunari had trouble maintaining relationships with men whose power he needed.

He immediately recognised Tokugawa as a threat to the Toyotomi rule, so headed an unsuccessful plot to have him assassinated. While provincial regents built up their military forces amid flying accusations of betrayal, outraged condemnations of clans and families attacking one another, Tokugawa finally summoned together all his supporters into a





The western samurai Otani led his forces through the battle despite being blind and crippled

powerful force. Mitsunari also took advantage of the chaos, bringing together all those loyal to the Toyotomi clan.

The two armies assemble

Tokugawa wasn't the only one with powerful friends. While his rival was distracted hunting down a wayward clan that had taken up arms, Mitsunari gathered a group of powerful samurai and government figures, including Otani Yoshitsugu and Mori Terumoto. The force he brought together became the western army to counter Tokugawa's eastern army. Terumoto took the near-abandoned Osaka castle as his base, but when Tokugawa learned of his enemy's movements he split his forces, sending several daimyo to engage the main western army while he marched towards Osaka.

Both armies were now marching towards Gifu castle, where the roads to Osaka converged. Mitsunari intended to take the castle and use it as a staging area for his planned takeover of Kyoto. However, his enemy got there first, and the general was forced to retreat south against a violent storm.

Wet, cold, tired and with uselessly damp gunpowder, Mitsunari and his men halted at the town of Sekigahara, expecting the eastern army to attack at any time. He arranged his men in a defensive position with two streams either side of them. On 20 October, Tokugawa finally learned of the disposition of his enemy's troops after his advanced guard accidentally stumbled right upon the waiting army in thick fog. Both sides panicked and withdrew before any action was taken, but battle was now inevitable.

To many it seemed that Tokugawa's army was completely outmatched. Mitsunari's western army numbered some 120,000 men, over 40,000 more than the eastern opposition. Mitsunari also held all the tactical advantages: he had men positioned high on the hills around the terrain, and his own army was placed between two rivers. But Tokugawa was no fool, and had managed to sneak in a supply of arquebuses – powerful muzzle-loading firearms that could easily turn the tide of battle against a sword-equipped foe. Perhaps most importantly, his scheming had taken root among the ranks of the western army, as he had promised swaths of land to the daimyo that would change sides during the battle. First he needed to demonstrate that his was the winning cause.

> "Wet, cold, tired and with uselessly damp gunpowder, Mitsunari and his men halted at the town of Sekigahara, expecting the eastern army to attack"

The eastern army attacks

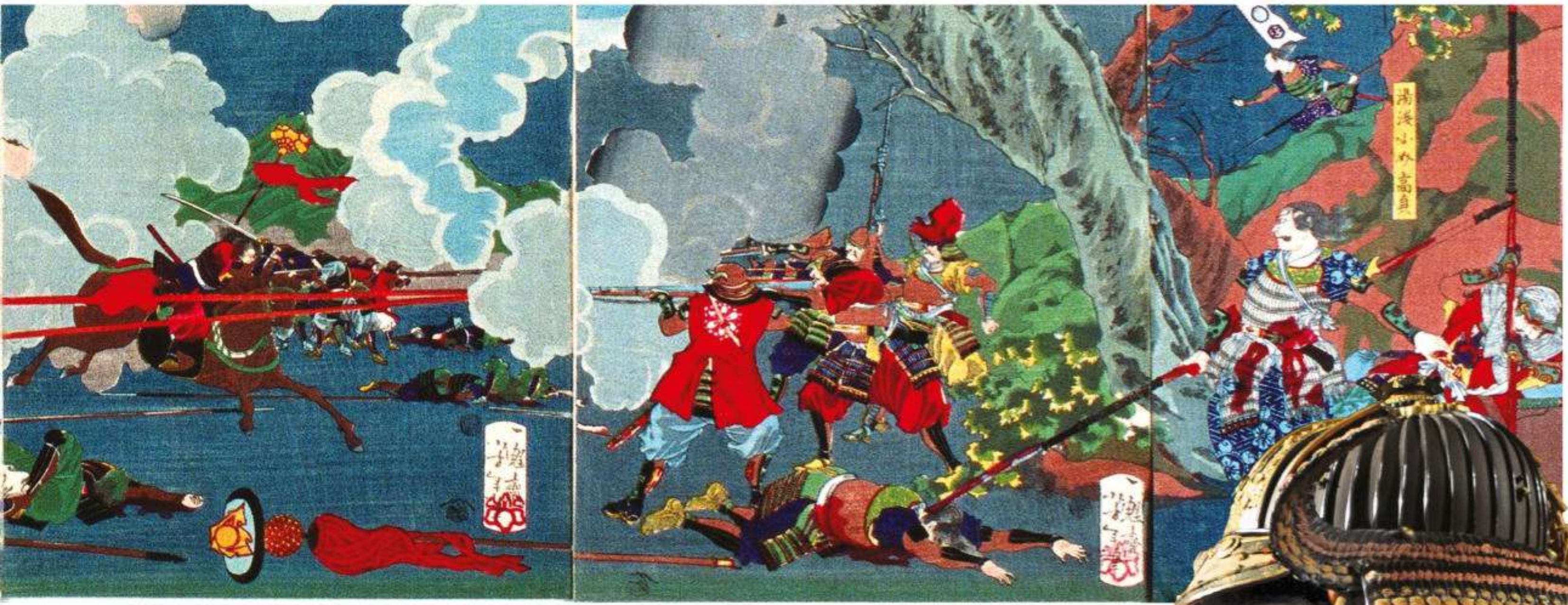
As soon as the heavy mist masking the field lifted, Tokugawa's vanguard, led by Fukushima Masanori, charged north, following the Fuji river. They crashed into the western army's defensive line positioned in the right-centre, where persistent rain had softened the ground into a muddy, sludgy mess. The organised lines quickly descended into chaos and the fighting became brutal, with men desperately tearing into one another, but neither side gained an advantage in the sudden desperate madness.

Tokugawa, witnessing Fukushima's attack failing to make any ground, commanded his right and his centre to charge the enemy's left, hoping that sheer numbers would overwhelm and Fukushima would finally be able to break through. The large number of samurai streaming across the field caught Mitsunari's attention, causing him to turn his as yet unscathed centre force. This simple command began to show the cracks in not only Mitsunari's army, but also his own leadership. Shimazu Yoshihiro, in control of the centre, flat out refused to ride to the aid of the right flank, and the powerful daimyo proclaimed he would only listen to respected commanders. Mitsunari's stubborn centre remained firmly in place, and he could only watch as Tokugawa's attack sliced through his men.

With Mitsunari's centre refusing to move, Masanori's attack finally gained ground, but this only served to put them in more danger. As the eastern force advanced along the Fuji river, Otani Yoshitsugu, one of the few powerful samurai who Mitsunari had somehow managed to convince to defect to his side, stood positioned across the river. His forces were able to pounce on the advancing eastern army, slowing Fukushima's attack once more.

The splintered western shield

Also positioned across the Fuji river, on Mount Matsuo, Kobayakawa Hideaki, began by fighting for the western alliance. However, Tokugawa had courted the general before the battle and Kobayakawa had secretly promised he would defect to fight with the eastern army when the time was right. With Yoshitsugu's surprise forces just past him, the time was ideal for Kobayakawa to act – but he hesitated. With Mitsunari sending frantic signals for Kobayakawa to aid Yoshitsugu, and Tokugawa aware that his entire cause could hang on whether Kobayakawa moved, the general froze. Not a man known for patience, Tokugawa decided to take action. He commanded his men to fire their arquebuses at Kobayakawa's position, forcing him to make a choice. As the shots rained down on Mount Matsuo, Kobayakawa's force finally charged down



the hill into the fray. Kobayakawa's soldiers ignored Masanori and directed their attack at the western leader, Yoshitsugu. Kobayakawa, although it had taken some persuasion, held firm on his promise and betrayed his western allies.

However, Yoshitsugu and Mitsunari already suspected Kobayakawa's potential betrayal long before the battle, so prepared for his defection. Kobayakawa's force of 15,000 men crashed into Yoshitsugu's sturdy forces, who had turned to face the turncoats head on and fought them back bravely with their fresh, dry gunpowder. Although this rendered Kobayakawa's charge largely ineffective, Yoshitsugu came under immense and growing pressure. With these extra opponents on the field, under the command of several mighty samurai, there was no denying the fact that he was completely outnumbered.

Seeing Yoshitsugu barely holding out against such odds, one-by-one four western generals and their troops switched sides and swarmed upon the exposed Yoshitsugu forces from all sides. The effect was decisive – the inflated eastern forces overwhelmed the western defenders on the left flank. Seeing this, and that defeat was inevitable, Yoshitsugu took the only decision that honour left him and opened his stomach with his own sword to end his life.

Fukushima's unending charge

With Yoshitsugu's defeat, his forces quickly retreated from the field and left the western army's right flank free for the taking. Fukushima and Kobayakawa, now united in one huge, powerful force, thundered towards the right flank and destroyed it. At this point the eastern samurai outnumbered what remained of the loyal western force and their attack was swift and brutal.

They continued the attack and advanced on the western centre. Mitsunari, his confidence shattered by the multitudes of betrayals, realised that with his shield decimated, defeat was imminent. With the same calculated intelligence that prompted the formation of his army, he ordered the retreat and fled up the northern hill slopes, hoping to find shelter in Mount Ibuki, the highest mountain of the region. The western army followed his lead, scattering and fleeing into the mountains. Although some managed to escape unscathed, Tokugawa's forces chased, captured and triumphantly killed many of the fleeing commanders.

Tokugawa's eastern army had won, but later into the day forces absent from the battle finally began to arrive at Sekigahara. His own son, Hidetada, faced his father's wrath when he arrived late with over 38,000 men – a force that could have won him the battle far

Helmet

Known as a kabuto, this helmet comprises forged plates riveted together. The crescent moon helmet was famously worn by the warrior Date Masamune.

Mask

Samurai would often wear a variety of mempo face masks to help support the heavy helmet, while the fearsome designs played a vital psychological role.

Dou

Made from a series of steel plates linked together by leather thongs. This body armour would be covered with lacquer that would make it weather proof.

Opposing forces

Eastern Army	Western Army
LEADER Tokugawa Ieyasu	LEADERS Ishida Mitsunari, Mori Terumoto
STRENGTH Approx 88,890	STRENGTH Approx 81,890
GAME CHANGERS Arquebus: an early muzzle-loaded matchlock firearm considered dishonorable by many samurai.	GAME CHANGERS Strategic advantage and a greater number of troops stationed at key points.

quicker and cleaner. Hidetada had been distracted attempting to capture another castle, Ueda, against his father's own orders. Even some of Mitsunari's men had been held up – 15,000 troops slowed down by another conflict along the way. Had some of these troops arrived quicker, the result, and Japan's future, may have ended up very different.

The future of Japan

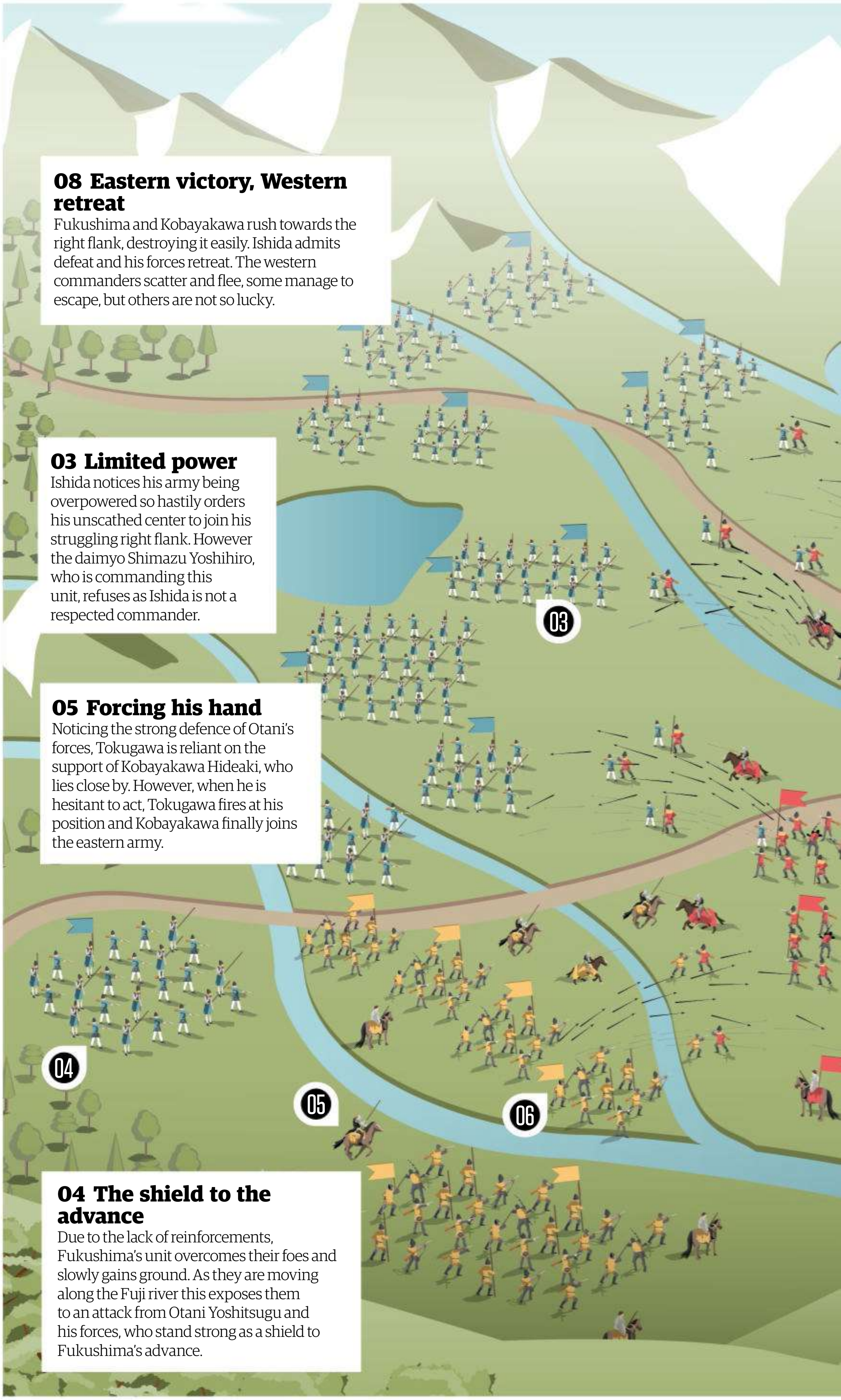
Mitsunari's escape didn't last for long. Villagers loyal to the now all-powerful Tokugawa caught the fleeing samurai and handed him over to his enemies, who beheaded him in Kyoto along with several other powerful western daimyo. Tokugawa had to be sure his rule wouldn't be challenged by any other powerful men with dubious allegiances. As an example to others, Mitsunari's head was placed on a stand for all to see – a strong warning to anyone who dared rise up against the new shogun.

Tokugawa was true to his word, after the battle he redistributed the lands to those who had fought by his side and who came true on their vows to change sides. Those who fought against him paid dearly. Toyotomi territories fell into his hands and pockets of Toyotomi support quickly faded after the public executions of the western leaders.

Three years after the Battle of Sekigahara, Emperor Go-Yozei appointed Tokugawa as shogun of Japan, and the battle soon became celebrated as one of the most important victories in the nation's history. At 60 years old, Tokugawa managed to outlive and rise above all of the powerful men of his generation in every possible way. Aware that his years left on earth were few, he began to concentrate on strengthening his shogunate and eliminating the last remaining Toyotomi clan members in one final clash at Osaka castle.

With nobody around with enough power to challenge his rule, Tokugawa ensured his ancestors would rule the country for another 250 years. Although it emerged through bloody means, the Edo period under the shogunate is remembered as the last period of traditional Japan, before the aggressive westernisation of the 19th century. The Mori, Shimazu and Chosokabe clans maintained their contempt for the Tokugawa family; it was so strong that it would go on to be passed down to their descendants. They would eventually rise together to bring down not only the Tokugawa dynasty, but also a way of life that had endured for centuries.

> "At 60 years old, Tokugawa managed to outlive and rise above all of the powerful men of his generation"



08 Eastern victory, Western retreat

Fukushima and Kobayakawa rush towards the right flank, destroying it easily. Ishida admits defeat and his forces retreat. The western commanders scatter and flee, some manage to escape, but others are not so lucky.

03 Limited power

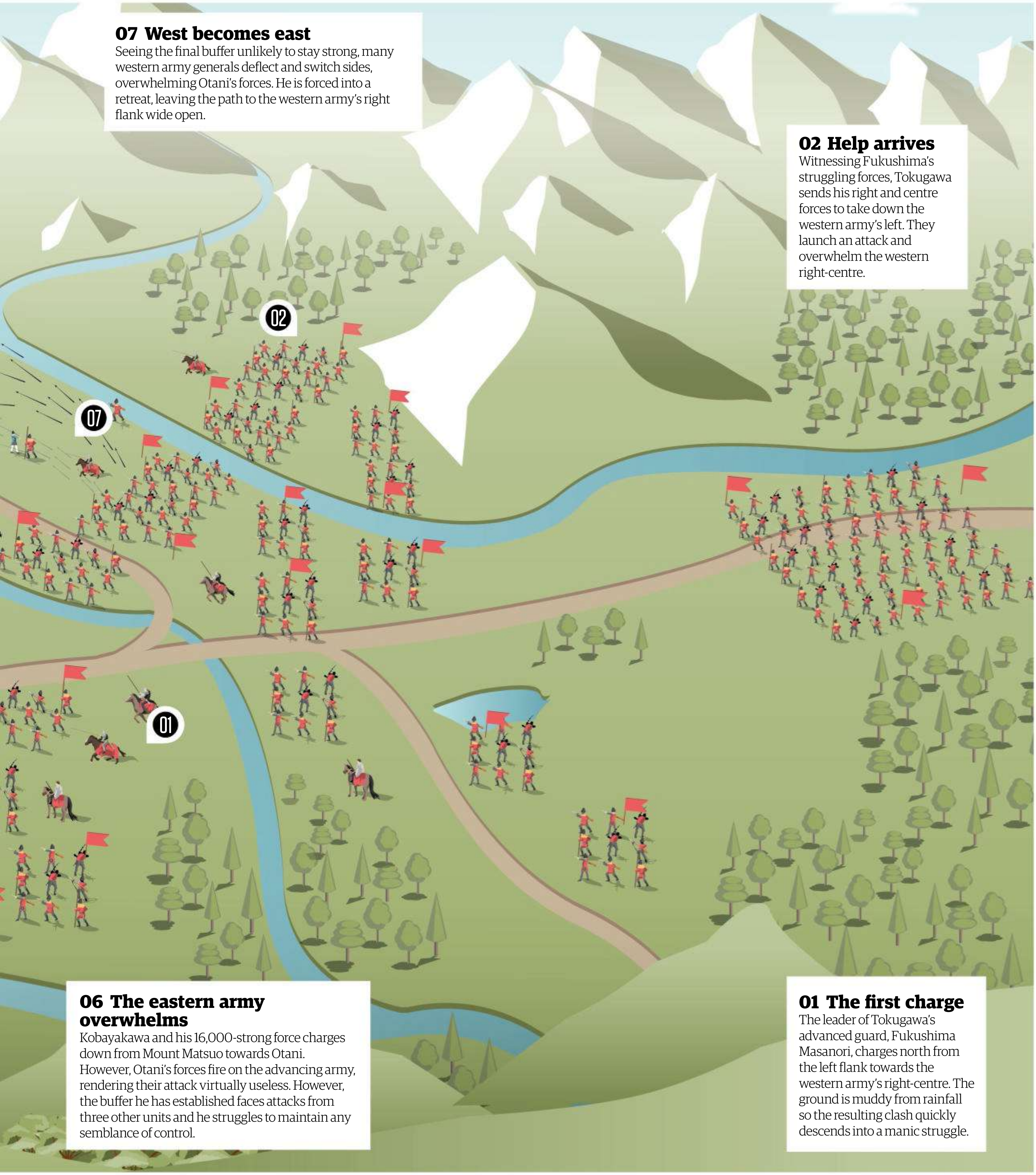
Ishida notices his army being overpowered so hastily orders his unscathed center to join his struggling right flank. However the daimyo Shimazu Yoshihiro, who is commanding this unit, refuses as Ishida is not a respected commander.

05 Forcing his hand

Noticing the strong defence of Otani's forces, Tokugawa is reliant on the support of Kobayakawa Hideaki, who lies close by. However, when he is hesitant to act, Tokugawa fires at his position and Kobayakawa finally joins the eastern army.

04 The shield to the advance

Due to the lack of reinforcements, Fukushima's unit overcomes their foes and slowly gains ground. As they are moving along the Fuji river this exposes them to an attack from Otani Yoshitsugu and his forces, who stand strong as a shield to Fukushima's advance.



07 West becomes east

Seeing the final buffer unlikely to stay strong, many western army generals deflect and switch sides, overwhelming Otani's forces. He is forced into a retreat, leaving the path to the western army's right flank wide open.

02 Help arrives

Witnessing Fukushima's struggling forces, Tokugawa sends his right and centre forces to take down the western army's left. They launch an attack and overwhelm the western right-centre.

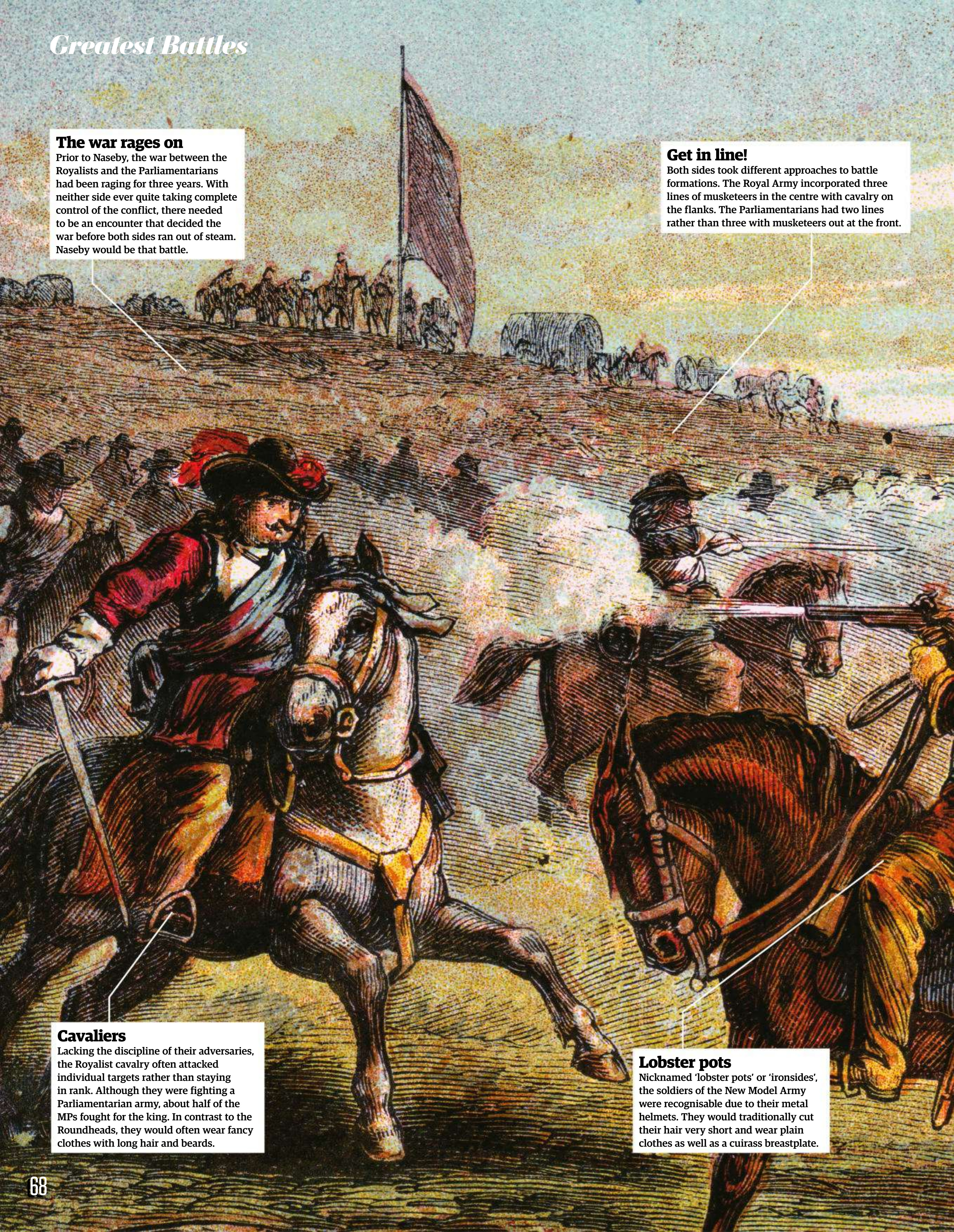
06 The eastern army overwhelms

Kobayakawa and his 16,000-strong force charges down from Mount Matsuo towards Otani. However, Otani's forces fire on the advancing army, rendering their attack virtually useless. However, the buffer he has established faces attacks from three other units and he struggles to maintain any semblance of control.

01 The first charge

The leader of Tokugawa's advanced guard, Fukushima Masanori, charges north from the left flank towards the western army's right-centre. The ground is muddy from rainfall so the resulting clash quickly descends into a manic struggle.

Ed Crooks



The war rages on

Prior to Naseby, the war between the Royalists and the Parliamentarians had been raging for three years. With neither side ever quite taking complete control of the conflict, there needed to be an encounter that decided the war before both sides ran out of steam. Naseby would be that battle.

Get in line!

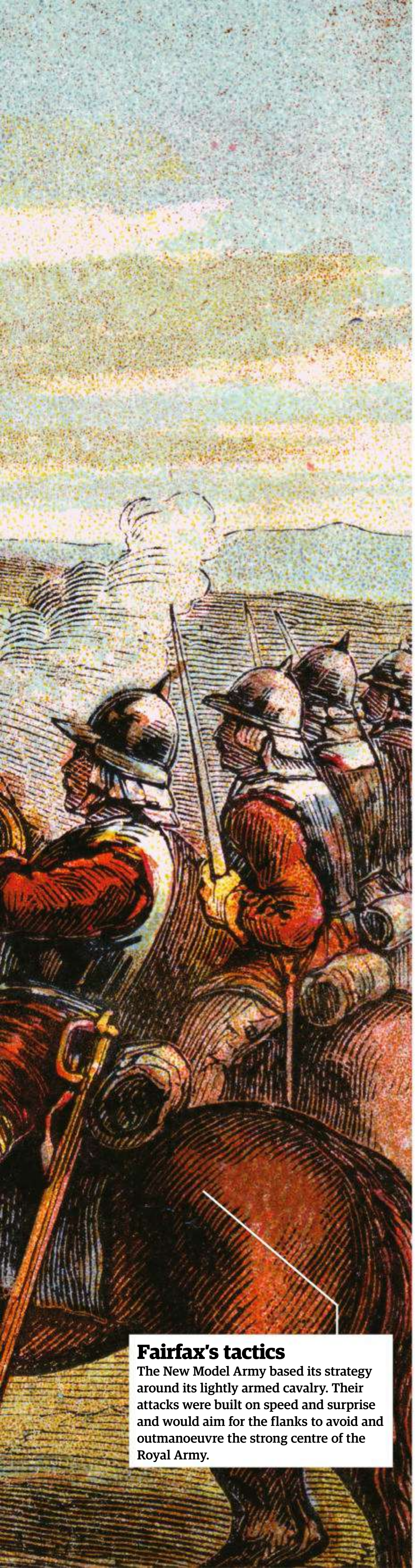
Both sides took different approaches to battle formations. The Royal Army incorporated three lines of musketeers in the centre with cavalry on the flanks. The Parliamentarians had two lines rather than three with musketeers out at the front.

Cavaliers

Lacking the discipline of their adversaries, the Royalist cavalry often attacked individual targets rather than staying in rank. Although they were fighting a Parliamentarian army, about half of the MPs fought for the king. In contrast to the Roundheads, they would often wear fancy clothes with long hair and beards.

Lobster pots

Nicknamed 'lobster pots' or 'ironsides', the soldiers of the New Model Army were recognisable due to their metal helmets. They would traditionally cut their hair very short and wear plain clothes as well as a cuirass breastplate.



Fairfax's tactics
The New Model Army based its strategy around its lightly armed cavalry. Their attacks were built on speed and surprise and would aim for the flanks to avoid and outmanoeuvre the strong centre of the Royal Army.

BATTLE OF NASEBY

VILLAGE OF NASEBY, NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

SATURDAY 14 JUNE 1645

Naseby may only be a tiny English village in the Midlands, but on the morning of 14 June, it played host to a pivotal battle in the English Civil War. The bloody nationwide conflict had been drawn out for more than three years, with neither side managing to assert any clear authority. The Parliamentarian forces were now more determined than ever to finally bring down the Royalist cause, and on this day, the New Model Army, a modernised professional fighting force, would prove its supremacy.

The Roundheads' influential leader, Oliver Cromwell, was present but would not be leading his forces, so the task fell to the talented commander Thomas Fairfax. The Royalist army would be led by the king, Charles I, and supported by his loyal band of subjects.

As the clock ticked past 9am, battle began on the misty open fields of Northamptonshire. Overlooking the village from a ridge, the 12 regiments of the New Model Army made the first move and marched into Naseby. The opposing armies now lined up face to face, with the cavalry regiments on the flanks and the infantry occupying the centre ground. The Royalists had a German commander in their ranks, and it was Prince Rupert of the Rhine who began proceedings with a rapid cavalry charge through the fog after he spotted enemy dragoon movement on the battlefield's western edge. The charge crashed into the Roundhead ranks, sweeping aside the stunned Parliamentarian horsemen, but instead of attacking the now exposed infantry, they pressed on to assault a baggage wagon in the centre of Naseby. Next came Charles's infantry and remaining mounted units, who engaged in a full frontal assault on the reeling Parliamentarians. The sheer ferocity of the attack drove the Roundheads back but could not maintain its momentum, and the Royalists failed to strike a crippling blow as the Parliamentarians slowly but surely began to regroup.

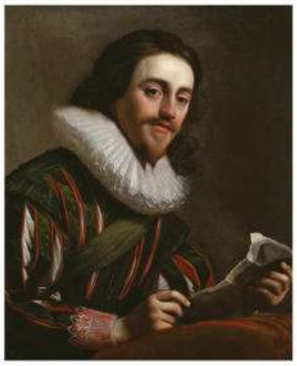
Rupert's decision to concentrate on the baggage train was a timely reprieve for Fairfax, who responded by directing his mounted troops, led by Cromwell, to attack the opposing flank. This attack became a key part of the battle. Sir Marmaduke Langdale's Royalist troops wilted in the face of the rapid cavalry attack and the Royalist infantry were sucked into a perfectly executed pincer movement before completely breaking. If Langdale's flank had held out, the Royalists could have potentially recovered, but it wasn't to be. Charles and his forces were now wide open to attack left, right and centre. Surrender was not far away.

Prince Rupert returned from the baggage train soon after but was now too late to bail out his allies. As the dust settled, it became clear that the Royalists had lost the battle and more than 1,000 men had died in only three hours of fighting. In contrast, the ruthless New Model Army only recorded casualties of about 200 men. Many of the king's best officers lay dead and his artillery abandoned as the remaining Royalists fled the scene. The battle was a hammerblow to the king, and within a year, the final pockets of royal resistance were taken care of. Cromwell was now the undisputed leader of his country and the age of the Lord Protectors was begun.

The Royal Army

INFANTRY 6,000

CAVALRY 5,500



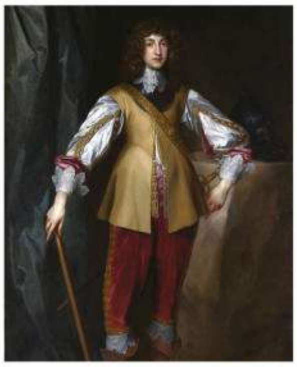
KING CHARLES I

LEADER

Dismissive of parliament's role in governing the country, Charles preferred absolute rule, which led to tension and eventually civil war.

Strengths Unshakeable belief in his God-given right to rule.

Weakness Declining support base due to his actions while in power.



CAVALIER

KEY UNIT

The iconic mounted units were key to Charles's military strength.

Strengths Experience of a long and hard civil war.

Weakness Position was based on status, not fighting ability.

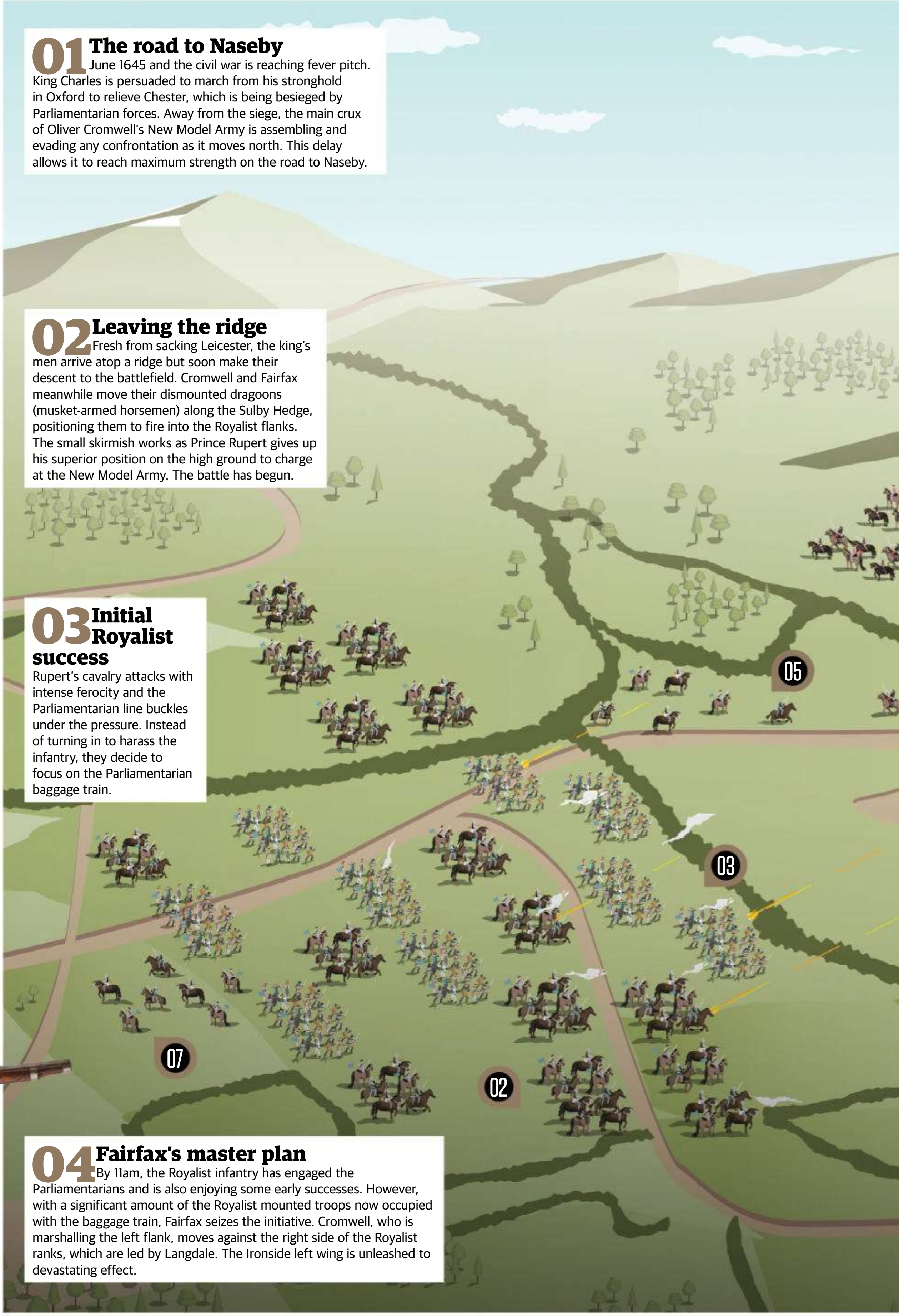
MATCHLOCK

KEY WEAPON

A type of musket, it was wielded by both the cavalry and infantry.

Strengths Power and range of shot.

Weakness Slow reload time, poor aim and match had to be constantly lit.



01 The road to Naseby

June 1645 and the civil war is reaching fever pitch. King Charles is persuaded to march from his stronghold in Oxford to relieve Chester, which is being besieged by Parliamentarian forces. Away from the siege, the main crux of Oliver Cromwell's New Model Army is assembling and evading any confrontation as it moves north. This delay allows it to reach maximum strength on the road to Naseby.

02 Leaving the ridge

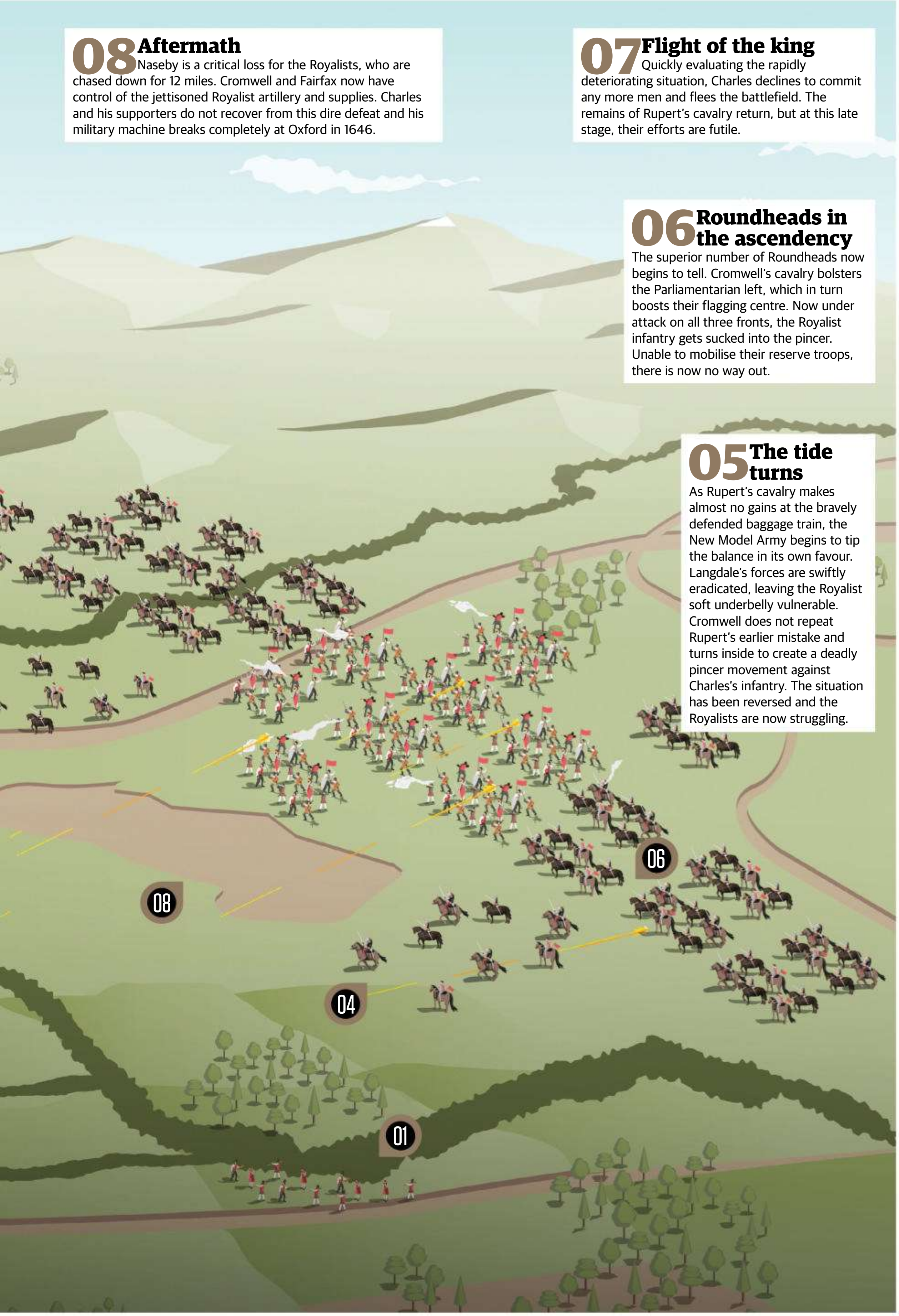
Fresh from sacking Leicester, the king's men arrive atop a ridge but soon make their descent to the battlefield. Cromwell and Fairfax meanwhile move their dismounted dragoons (musket-armed horsemen) along the Sulby Hedge, positioning them to fire into the Royalist flanks. The small skirmish works as Prince Rupert gives up his superior position on the high ground to charge at the New Model Army. The battle has begun.

03 Initial Royalist success

Rupert's cavalry attacks with intense ferocity and the Parliamentarian line buckles under the pressure. Instead of turning in to harass the infantry, they decide to focus on the Parliamentarian baggage train.

04 Fairfax's master plan

By 11am, the Royalist infantry has engaged the Parliamentarians and is also enjoying some early successes. However, with a significant amount of the Royalist mounted troops now occupied with the baggage train, Fairfax seizes the initiative. Cromwell, who is marshalling the left flank, moves against the right side of the Royalist ranks, which are led by Langdale. The Ironside left wing is unleashed to devastating effect.



08 Aftermath

Naseby is a critical loss for the Royalists, who are chased down for 12 miles. Cromwell and Fairfax now have control of the jettisoned Royalist artillery and supplies. Charles and his supporters do not recover from this dire defeat and his military machine breaks completely at Oxford in 1646.

07 Flight of the king

Quickly evaluating the rapidly deteriorating situation, Charles declines to commit any more men and flees the battlefield. The remains of Rupert's cavalry return, but at this late stage, their efforts are futile.

06 Roundheads in the ascendency

The superior number of Roundheads now begins to tell. Cromwell's cavalry bolsters the Parliamentarian left, which in turn boosts their flagging centre. Now under attack on all three fronts, the Royalist infantry gets sucked into the pincer. Unable to mobilise their reserve troops, there is now no way out.

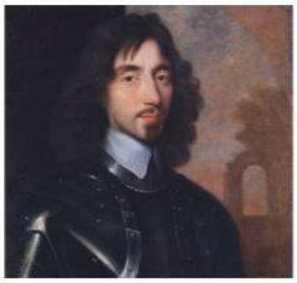
05 The tide turns

As Rupert's cavalry makes almost no gains at the bravely defended baggage train, the New Model Army begins to tip the balance in its own favour. Langdale's forces are swiftly eradicated, leaving the Royalist soft underbelly vulnerable. Cromwell does not repeat Rupert's earlier mistake and turns inside to create a deadly pincer movement against Charles's infantry. The situation has been reversed and the Royalists are now struggling.

New Model Army

INFANTRY 7,000

CAVALRY 8,000



SIR THOMAS FAIRFAX

LEADER

Appointed captain general of the New Model Army in 1645, Fairfax ranked above Cromwell due to the rule of Self-denying Ordinance.

Strengths Long career in the Parliamentarian Northern Army.

Weakness Naseby would be his first major engagement as captain general.

ROUNDHEAD DRAGOON

KEY UNIT

Led by Colonel John Okey, the dragoon units numbered at more than 1,000 strong.

Strengths Armour could deflect pistol fire and sword strokes.

Weakness Vulnerable to mounted cavalier attacks.

SABRE

KEY WEAPON

Firearms were often slow and inaccurate so cold steel still had a big part to play in the battles of the civil war.

Strengths Unmatched weapon when used at close quarters.

Weakness No defence against ranged attacks.

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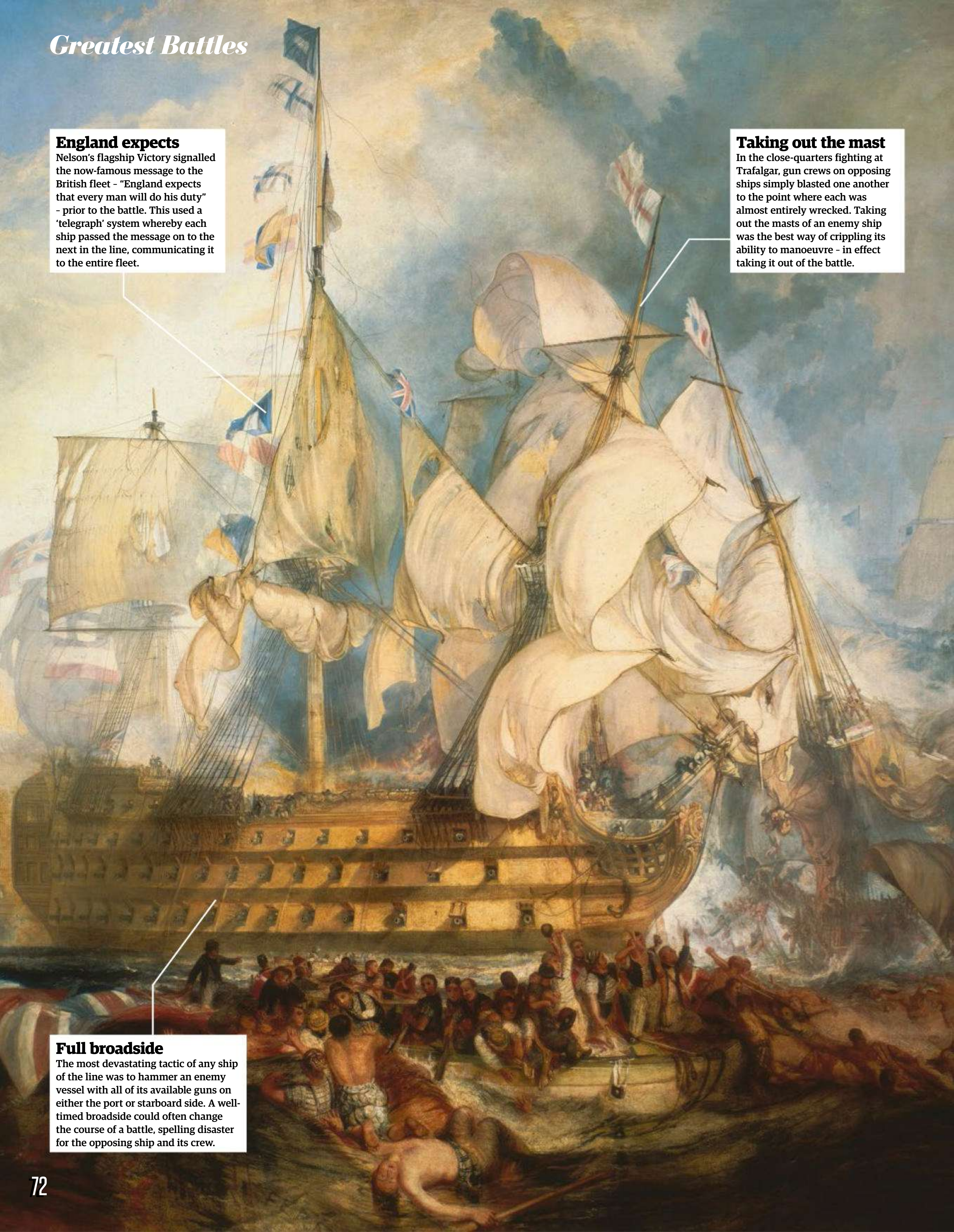


England expects

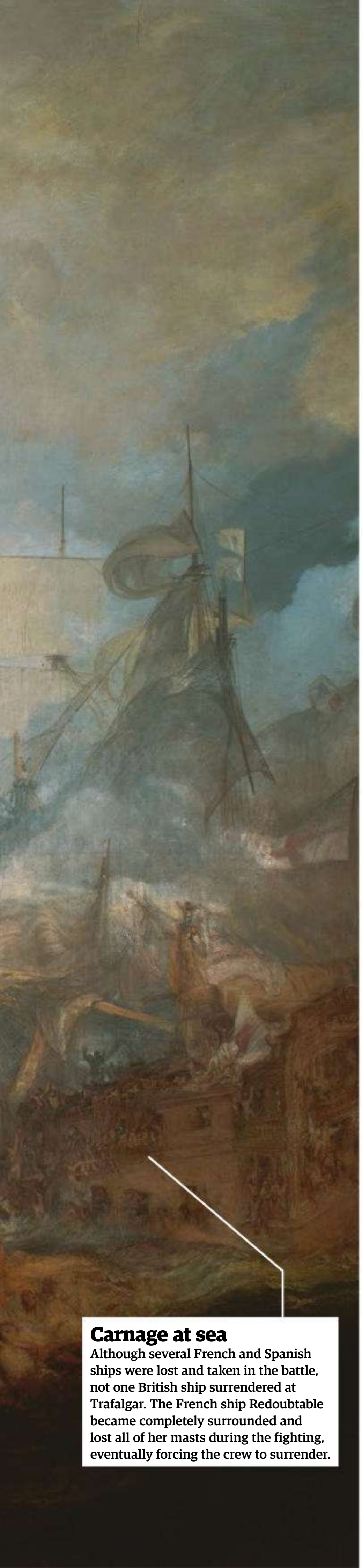
Nelson's flagship Victory signalled the now-famous message to the British fleet – "England expects that every man will do his duty" – prior to the battle. This used a 'telegraph' system whereby each ship passed the message on to the next in the line, communicating it to the entire fleet.

Taking out the mast

In the close-quarters fighting at Trafalgar, gun crews on opposing ships simply blasted one another to the point where each was almost entirely wrecked. Taking out the masts of an enemy ship was the best way of crippling its ability to manoeuvre – in effect taking it out of the battle.

Full broadside

The most devastating tactic of any ship of the line was to hammer an enemy vessel with all of its available guns on either the port or starboard side. A well-timed broadside could often change the course of a battle, spelling disaster for the opposing ship and its crew.



Carnage at sea
Although several French and Spanish ships were lost and taken in the battle, not one British ship surrendered at Trafalgar. The French ship Redoubtable became completely surrounded and lost all of her masts during the fighting, eventually forcing the crew to surrender.

BATTLE OF TRAFALGAR

OFF THE COAST OF TRAFALGAR, SOUTH-WEST SPAIN 21 OCTOBER 1805

In 1805, Britain was on the brink of invasion by the emperor of France, Napoleon Bonaparte. The Grande Armée, which was gathered in north France, only needed a fleet of ships to carry it across the English Channel and Great Britain would surely fall. That fleet, under the command of Admiral Villeneuve, had given Nelson the chase across the Atlantic Ocean and back as it gathered ships for the intended invasion. Known as the Combined Fleet of Spanish and French ships, it numbered more than enough vessels to ferry the French army securely to England. But first it had to reach France to collect them.

The British Royal Navy was tasked with locating and intercepting the Combined Fleet to stop any chance of it reaching the Grande Armée. Spies in France and Spain had provided ample intelligence regarding Napoleon's plan, as well as the movements of the allied fleet. In September 1805, Villeneuve's ships sat in Cádiz harbour, with Nelson's fleet waiting more than 50 miles offshore. A line of signal ships monitored Cádiz, eagerly waiting for Villeneuve to make a move.

Already a hero back home and among his peers, Nelson had served more than 34 years in the Royal Navy and had put his body on the line for king and country time and again, quite literally. The admiral lost his arm in 1797 while attempting to take Santa Cruz de Tenerife, and also lost his right eye during fighting there.

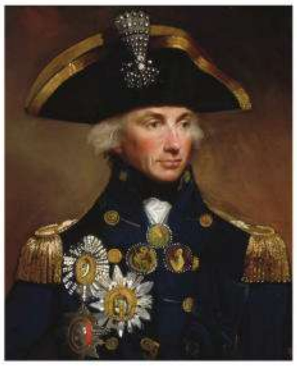
As the British force approached the south coast of Spain, it anchored further out to sea to conceal its presence from the Combined Fleet, which was still in the harbour. Small frigates were posted closer to land to monitor the coast for any movement of the enemy along the route around the peninsula. At all costs, Nelson wanted to prevent Villeneuve from escaping either north towards the Bay of Biscay and from there to France, or east towards the Gibraltar Strait and from there to the Mediterranean.

The French admiral, meanwhile, was being put under pressure from his emperor back home. His delay in leaving Spain and sailing for France had caused unease among his staff, and outright resentment from Napoleon, who called him a coward. Worse, Villeneuve had been fed false information about the British fleet and was still unaware that Nelson had arrived off the coast of Spain. Had the Frenchman known that the foremost admiral of the time was tracking his fleet, he may well have avoided the catastrophe he was about to sail right into.

British Fleet

SHIPS 27

GUNS 2,148



HORATIO NELSON

LEADER

The formidable British admiral was among the most feared and respected naval commanders of his time.

Strengths An unrivalled ability to out-think his enemy tactically.

Weakness His unorthodox methods carried great risk.

HMS VICTORY

KEY VESSEL

Nelson's famous first-rate flagship.

Strengths 104 guns over three gun decks.

Weakness A huge frame made manoeuvring more difficult.

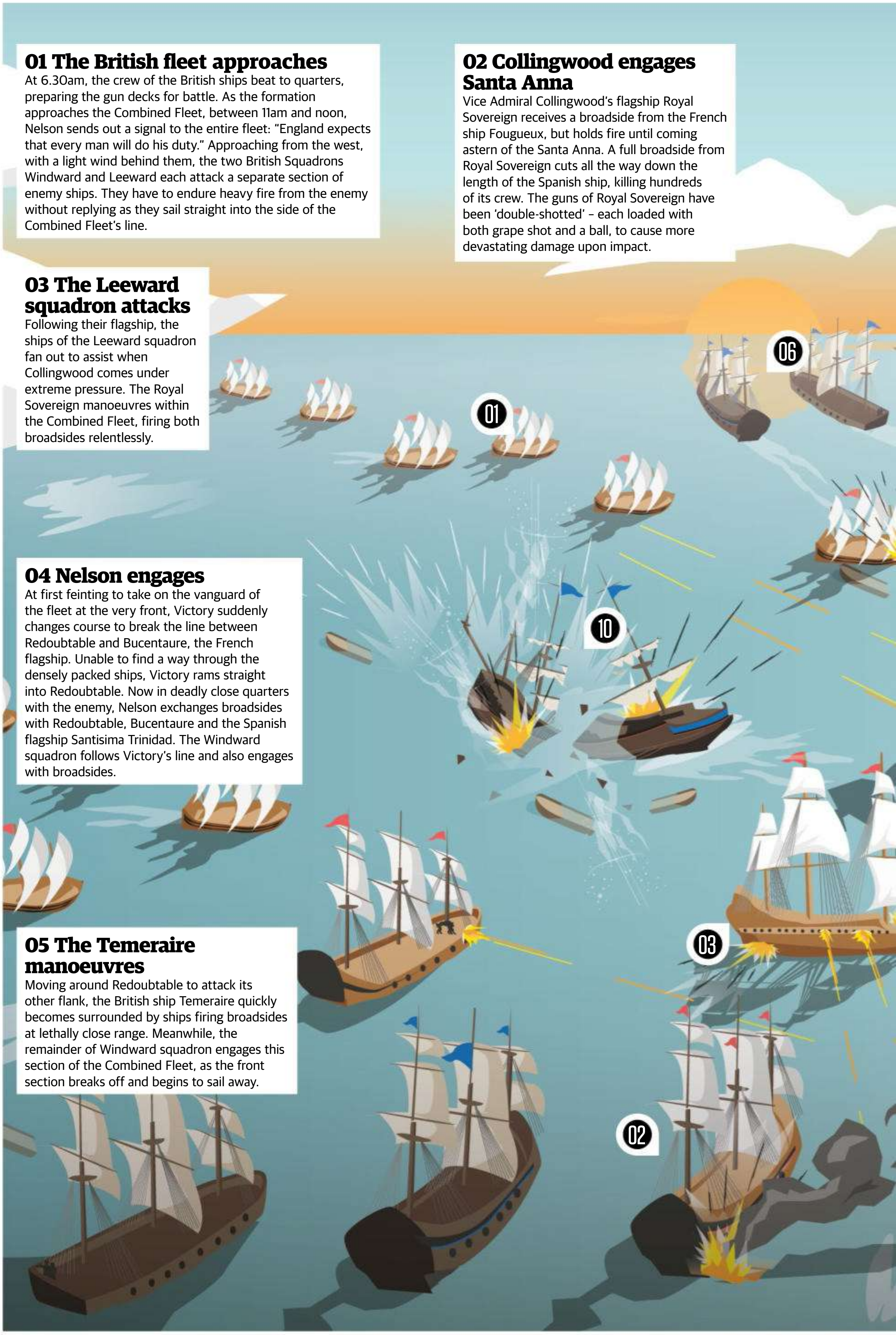
24-POUND GUN

KEY WEAPON

A hulking cannon capable of immense destruction.

Strengths Able to easily penetrate thick hulls.

Weakness Weighing three tons, it was far harder to handle for the gun crew.



01 The British fleet approaches

At 6.30am, the crew of the British ships beat to quarters, preparing the gun decks for battle. As the formation approaches the Combined Fleet, between 11am and noon, Nelson sends out a signal to the entire fleet: "England expects that every man will do his duty." Approaching from the west, with a light wind behind them, the two British Squadrons Windward and Leeward each attack a separate section of enemy ships. They have to endure heavy fire from the enemy without replying as they sail straight into the side of the Combined Fleet's line.

02 Collingwood engages Santa Anna

Vice Admiral Collingwood's flagship Royal Sovereign receives a broadside from the French ship Fougueux, but holds fire until coming astern of the Santa Anna. A full broadside from Royal Sovereign cuts all the way down the length of the Spanish ship, killing hundreds of its crew. The guns of Royal Sovereign have been 'double-shotted' – each loaded with both grape shot and a ball, to cause more devastating damage upon impact.

03 The Leeward squadron attacks

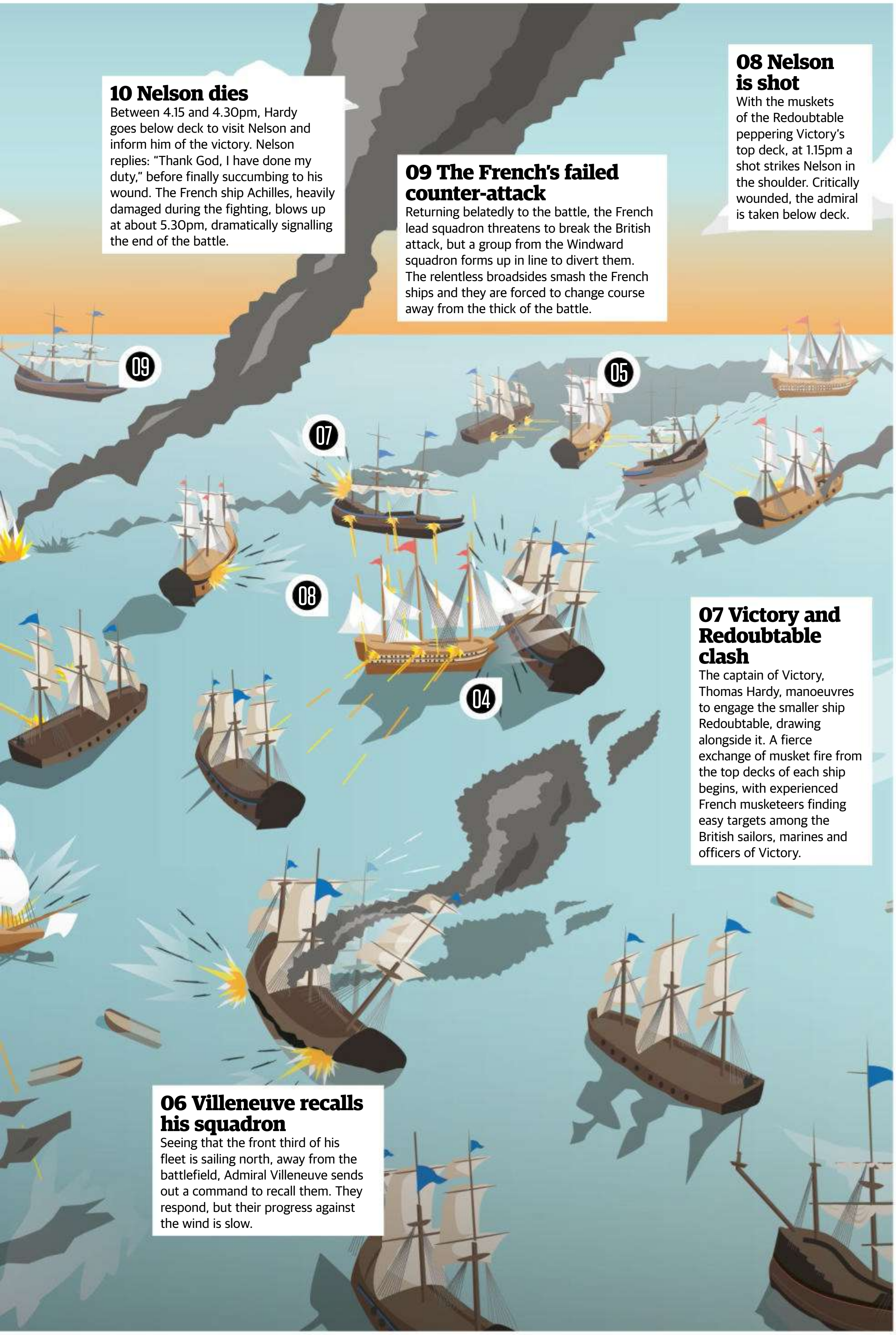
Following their flagship, the ships of the Leeward squadron fan out to assist when Collingwood comes under extreme pressure. The Royal Sovereign manoeuvres within the Combined Fleet, firing both broadsides relentlessly.

04 Nelson engages

At first feinting to take on the vanguard of the fleet at the very front, Victory suddenly changes course to break the line between Redoubtable and Bucentaure, the French flagship. Unable to find a way through the densely packed ships, Victory rams straight into Redoubtable. Now in deadly close quarters with the enemy, Nelson exchanges broadsides with Redoubtable, Bucentaure and the Spanish flagship Santisima Trinidad. The Windward squadron follows Victory's line and also engages with broadsides.

05 The Temeraire manoeuvres

Moving around Redoubtable to attack its other flank, the British ship Temeraire quickly becomes surrounded by ships firing broadsides at lethally close range. Meanwhile, the remainder of Windward squadron engages this section of the Combined Fleet, as the front section breaks off and begins to sail away.



10 Nelson dies

Between 4.15 and 4.30pm, Hardy goes below deck to visit Nelson and inform him of the victory. Nelson replies: "Thank God, I have done my duty," before finally succumbing to his wound. The French ship Achilles, heavily damaged during the fighting, blows up at about 5.30pm, dramatically signalling the end of the battle.

09 The French's failed counter-attack

Returning belatedly to the battle, the French lead squadron threatens to break the British attack, but a group from the Windward squadron forms up in line to divert them. The relentless broadsides smash the French ships and they are forced to change course away from the thick of the battle.

08 Nelson is shot

With the muskets of the Redoubtable peppering Victory's top deck, at 1.15pm a shot strikes Nelson in the shoulder. Critically wounded, the admiral is taken below deck.

07 Victory and Redoubtable clash

The captain of Victory, Thomas Hardy, manoeuvres to engage the smaller ship Redoubtable, drawing alongside it. A fierce exchange of musket fire from the top decks of each ship begins, with experienced French musketeers finding easy targets among the British sailors, marines and officers of Victory.

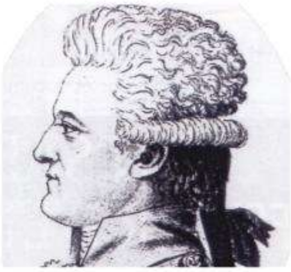
06 Villeneuve recalls his squadron

Seeing that the front third of his fleet is sailing north, away from the battlefield, Admiral Villeneuve sends out a command to recall them. They respond, but their progress against the wind is slow.

Combined Fleet

SHIPS 33

GUNS 2,630



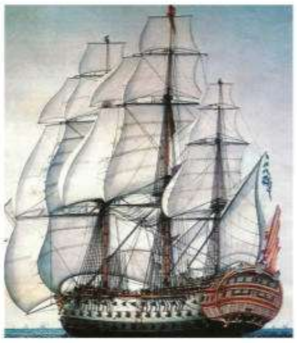
PIERRE-CHARLES VILLENEUVE

LEADER

The French admiral's cautious nature had been accused of cowardice by none other than Napoleon.

Strengths A numerically stronger fleet at his disposal.

Weakness Indecision and a poorly co-ordinated command structure.



SANTISIMA TRINIDAD

KEY VESSEL

The largest ship in the battle, this hulking first-rate vessel had four gun decks.

Strengths Overwhelming firepower from its 140 guns.

Weakness Slow and unresponsive in light winds.

CHAIN SHOT

KEY WEAPON

A highly destructive ammunition ideal for taking out the masts and rigging of ships.

Strengths Could cripple an enemy ship by bringing down its mast.

Weakness Only effective when fired at close range.

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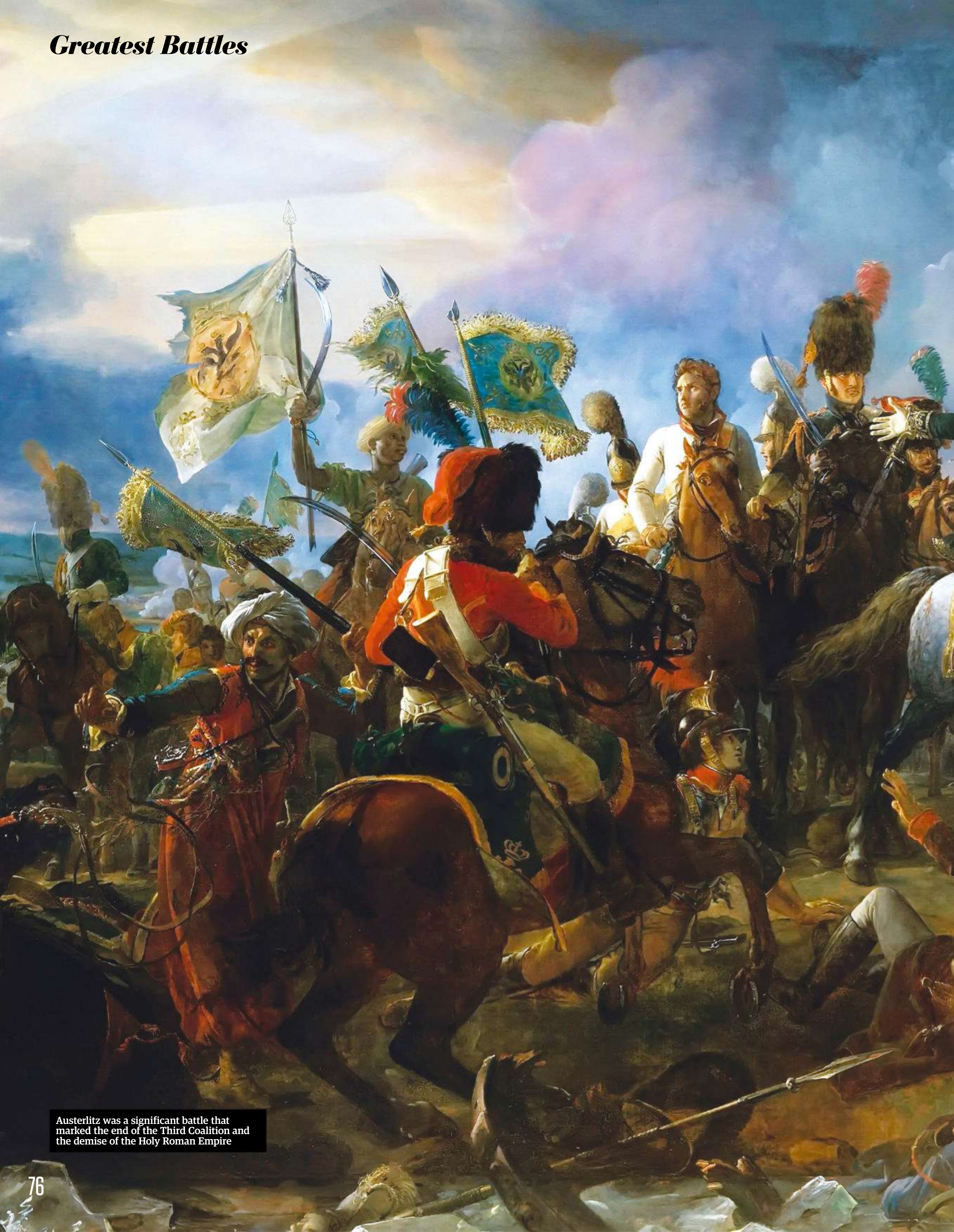

Austerlitz was a significant battle that marked the end of the Third Coalition and the demise of the Holy Roman Empire

BATTLE OF AUSTERLITZ

AUSTERLITZ, MORAVIA 2 DECEMBER 1805

Ever since the turn of the 19th century, Western Europe had been a battleground. The Empires of old had been struggling against a reinvigorated First French Republic, and by 1803 a Third Coalition had been created to oppose Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte. Originally, the French had wanted to invade Britain, but their loss to the Royal Navy at Trafalgar and the subsequent Treaty of Amiens meant Napoleon began to cast his eyes eastwards. Having already secured Spain as an ally, the two powers that stood in the way were the Habsburg Monarchy and what remained of an ailing Holy Roman Empire, plus the mighty Russian Empire. Led by Francis II and Tsar Alexander respectively, the war would now be fought between three emperors.

Napoleon was a shrewd tactician, with the loyal and resolute Grande Armée at his disposal. His strategic nous was evident as soon as the war began in September 1805, as French troops scored victories against the Austrian army at Ulm and Munich. There was seemingly no stopping the Grande Armée, which had crossed the Rhine and emphatically swept across the continent. This was followed by the quick capture of Vienna in November of that year. Vienna was the capital and centre of the Habsburg Empire, and its swift occupation shocked the major powers. There had to be a response, and it came near the town of Austerlitz in the kingdom of Moravia (now the Czech Republic). Would Napoleon be an unbeatable force, or would the old armies of the opposing European kingdoms prove too strong?

The battle plan

The battle took place atop the Pratzen Heights. It was a foggy morning, as vast regiments from three armies amassed and awaited orders from above. The Russians stood in the winter cold, confident that the excellent artillery within its ranks would dismantle the French regiments. The Austrian cavalry, armed with their cold steel, were considered among the best mounted troops in the world. In total, the allied coalition numbered 85,000 Russians and Austrians.

The generals were confident of stopping the French advance, and had outlined a plan devised by Austrian Chief of Staff General Weyrother. The strategy was designed to target the French right flank in an attempt to force them southwards and open up a path to retake Vienna. Russian General von Buxhoevden, who would be joined on the opposite side by General Bagration, would lead this advance. The centre would be held in reserve to keep the flanks steady. In charge of all the allied operations was Field Marshal Mihhail Kutuzov, but he was soon brushed aside in favour of the direct leadership of Tsar Alexander I, who was hungry for an all-out assault that would finally crush the Grande Armée.

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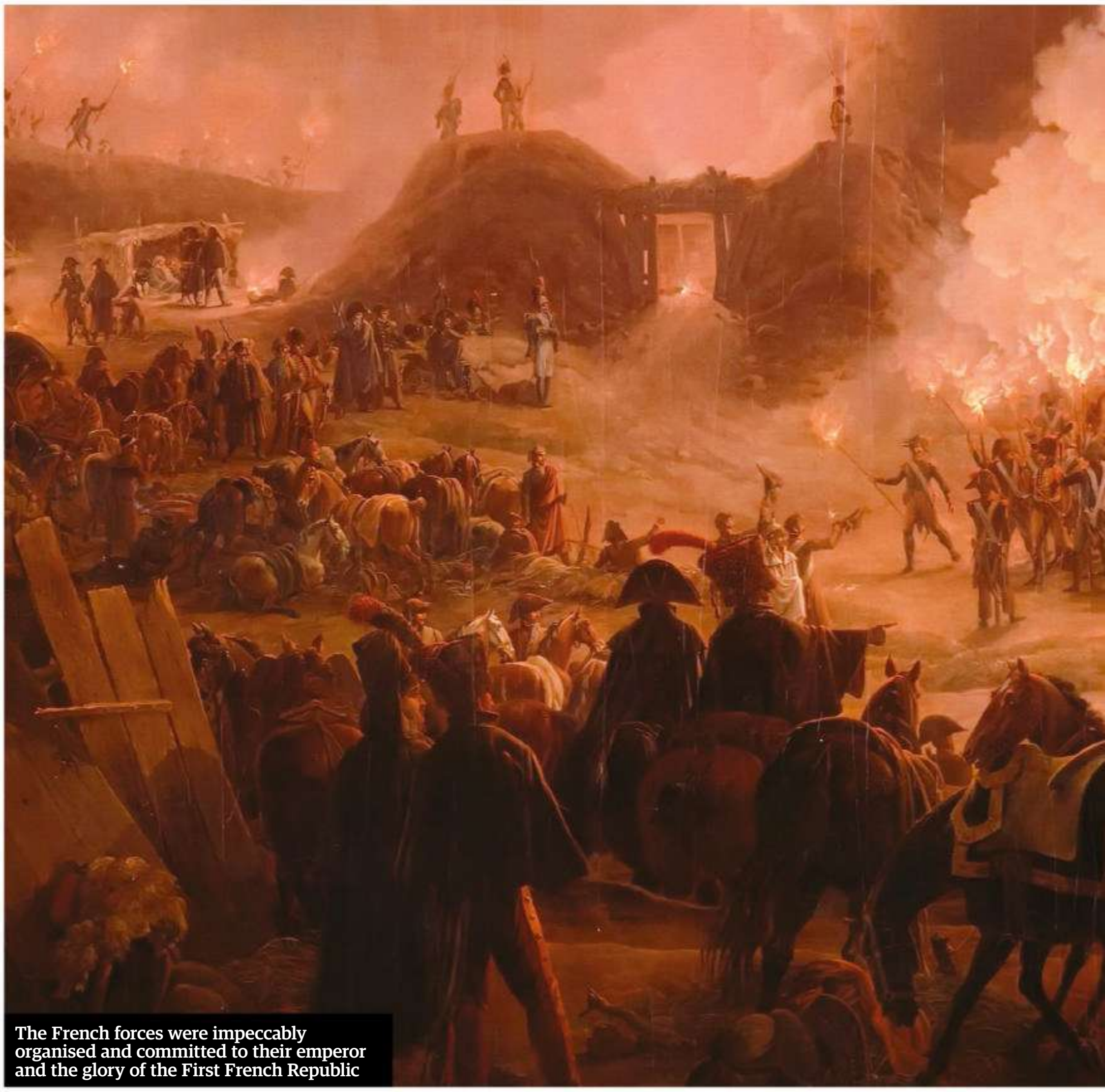
The Austrians and Kutuzov were willing to wait and force Napoleon's hand, but Alexander was far too reckless to even consider this approach. The Emperor would rather listen to his own desires than the Commander-in-Chief and besides, the Austrians were not be trusted after their capitulation in battle at Ulm a few months prior.

Napoleon, meanwhile, had a strategy of his own. After having failed to prevent the two Russian armies linking up, Austerlitz now became the location of the French Army's stand. The right side of his forces, which the coalition saw as a potential fragile point, was falsely weakened by the Emperor to draw the allied troops in. If General Legrand's IV Corps could hold the Russians and Austrians here, the soft underbelly in the centre of the coalition was there for the taking. Napoleon, a self-made general, even rode with his troops into the heat of battle – a very different approach to the old-style Austrian and Russian emperors. The French numbered 73,000, as they lacked the VIII Corps that remained posted in Vienna, the II Corps who were watching the Alps and the VI Corps stationed in Carinthia. Shrewdly, Napoleon sent his aide, Anne Jean Marie René Savary, to negotiate an armistice and in doing so, deceived the Allies into thinking that the French lacked confidence. While this was happening, his soldiers organised and equipped themselves.

Napoleon based his army on organisation and professionalism, and his popularity was at an all-time high with the French troops, who were at the peak of their morale, with this battle taking place on the anniversary of the emperor's coronation. This boosted the Grande Armée, which was otherwise on the point of exhaustion, after an arduous campaign through central Europe.

The Third Coalition was aware of the French fatigue, but had problems of its own. The allied force was 70 per cent Russian and 30 per cent Austrian, so many of the orders given out had to be translated back and forth between two languages, which made it difficult to undertake a complex strategy. However, they were pinning their hopes on reinforcements from both Archduke Ferdinand Karl Joseph to the north-west and Archdukes Charles and John from Italy to the south. This was enhanced further by 4,000 Austrians and 12,000 Russians already on their way to the battlefield, and would arrive in the next few days. If the battle could be delayed just a bit, then the coalition's numbers would increase dramatically. However, this way of thinking was never on Alexander's mind; he would defeat Napoleon there and then.



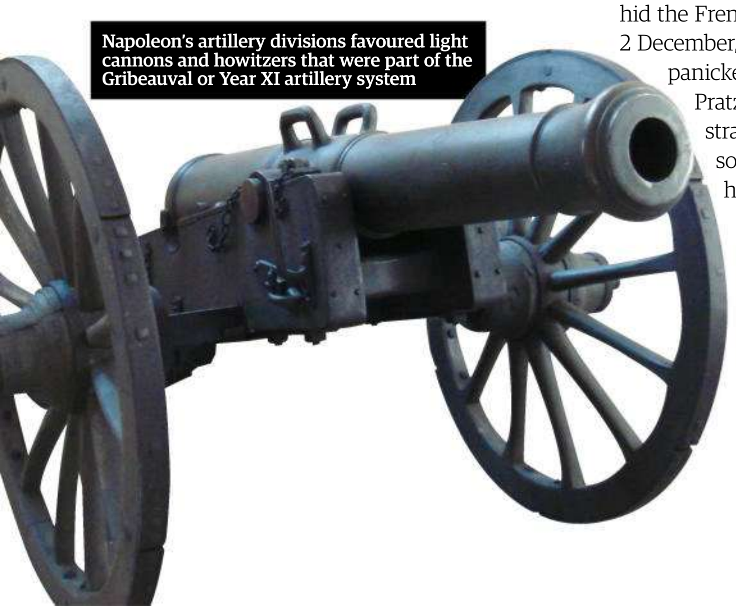
The French forces were impeccably organised and committed to their emperor and the glory of the First French Republic

The battle begins

Overnight the weather had remained foggy, which hid the French deployment. Just before 7am on 2 December, the allies spied what looked like a panicked retreat by the French from the Pratzen Heights. In line with their initial strategy, 40,000 Russian troops moved south towards Napoleon's right wing that had just hurried from the heights.

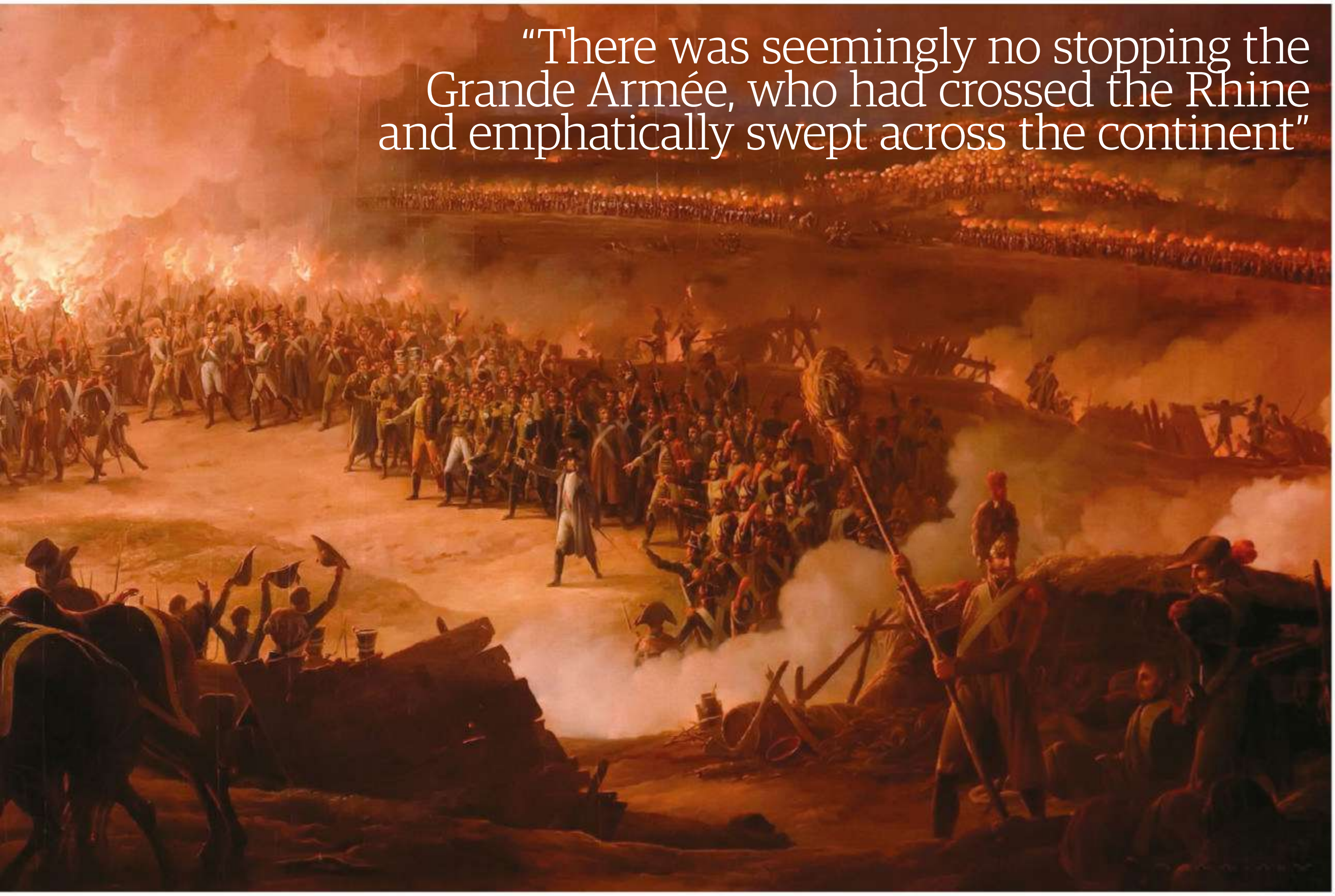
Over the ridge, 10,500 French lay in wait, and fighting began across the Goldbach stream near the village of Telnitz. The Goldbach would act as the dividing line between the opposing forces. The Russians and Austrians held the ascendancy in the battle's initial exchanges, and their strategy was going to plan, but their progress was checked in the village, where the late arrival of the French III Corps had swung the pendulum back in Napoleon's favour.

The French Emperor's original plan had been scuppered by the enemy not moving their entire force from the centre, but being a tactical genius, he had other ways of turning events to his favour. Led by General Davout, 4,300 men had been summoned by Napoleon to march 110km (68 miles) from Vienna to bolster the French forces. In one of history's closest shaves, they managed to complete their march in 48 hours and arrive just in time to strengthen the right flank, which was buckling



Napoleon's artillery divisions favoured light cannons and howitzers that were part of the Gribeauval or Year XI artillery system

> "Napoleon rode with troops into the heat of battle, a different approach from the old-style emperors"

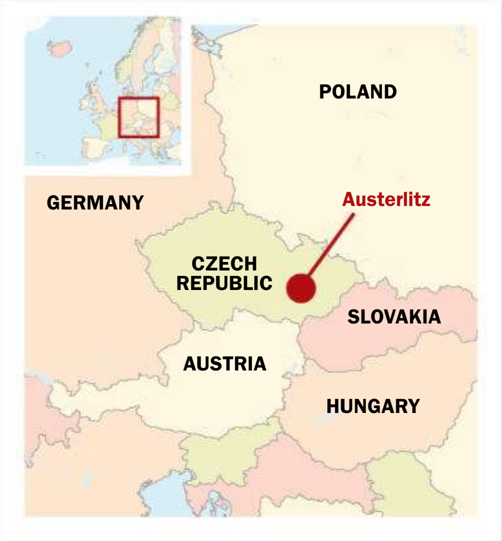


> "There was seemingly no stopping the Grande Armée, who had crossed the Rhine and emphatically swept across the continent"

under the allied onslaught. In the shadow of the old fortress at Sokolnitz, the occupation of the heights changed hands frequently, but eventually Davout's men managed to end the stalemate and turn the tide to smash through the allied ranks. Despite a short rally from the Austrian O'Reilly light cavalry, the coalition troops began to flee. The battle had been turned on its head, and nearly all the allied advances had now been checked.

With the battle of the heights over, the conflict turned to the left and centre sides of the battlefield. An initial cavalry charge on the left flank saw horses from both sides slam into one another, while in the centre the Russian Imperial Guard launched into the French battalions as the coalition rallied. 3,000 grenadiers broke the first French line, and were only stopped after a timely artillery barrage. The imperial guard regrouped to allow their artillery to exact revenge and bombard the French, who had formed defensive squares on the battlefield. The coalition cavalry then struck the weakened squares and captured their only trophy from Austerlitz, the French Fourth Line's Eagle.

Napoleon, seeing the fight for the centre ground becoming a losing battle, sent his own imperial guard into the fray, with emphatic results. Scattered after their initial success, the Russian Imperial Guard did not maintain their line, and were easily picked off by the French counter-attack, boosted by the I Corps. This hammer blow crumbed the



ARTILLERY 139	ARTILLERY 278
TROOPS 67,000	TROOPS 73,000
LOSSES C.7,500	LOSSES C.1,500

LEADERS

NAPOLEON I, CLAUDE LEGRAND, LOUIS ALEXANDRE BERTHIER

GAME CHANGERS

The Grande Armée was battle-hardened, organised and willing to die for the emperor on the anniversary of his coronation.

REGIMENTS

Imperial Guard, I Corps, III Corps, IV Corps, V Corps, Heavy cavalry and dragoon reserves.

LEADERS

ALEXANDER I, FRANCIS II, MIKHAIL KUTUSOV

GAME CHANGERS

The power of the Russian artillery was vastly superior to anything that the French could muster.

REGIMENTS

Imperial Guard, 2x Advance Guard, First Column, Second Column, Third Column, Fourth Column (All Russian), 3rd Austrian Infantry Brigade, Fifth Column (Austrian).

allied centre, and the battle for the left flank was still raging. The allied formation was split into two, and lacked a core. The French Divisions could now outmanoeuvre the scattered Russians and Austrians and attack them from all sides.

As the battle raged into the afternoon, young French General Lannes went on the offensive to the north of the battle in an attempt to strike down the Austrian divisions led by General Bagration. He almost succeeded, but was foiled after a battery of Austrian artillery made a timely intervention. The Austrians were still pegged back, but were not cut off from the rest of their force as Lannes had hoped. As Tsar Alexander took stock and analysed what had happened, he realised that the coalition high command had been torn from the main army, and unable to direct the battle effectively. Napoleon had the upper hand.

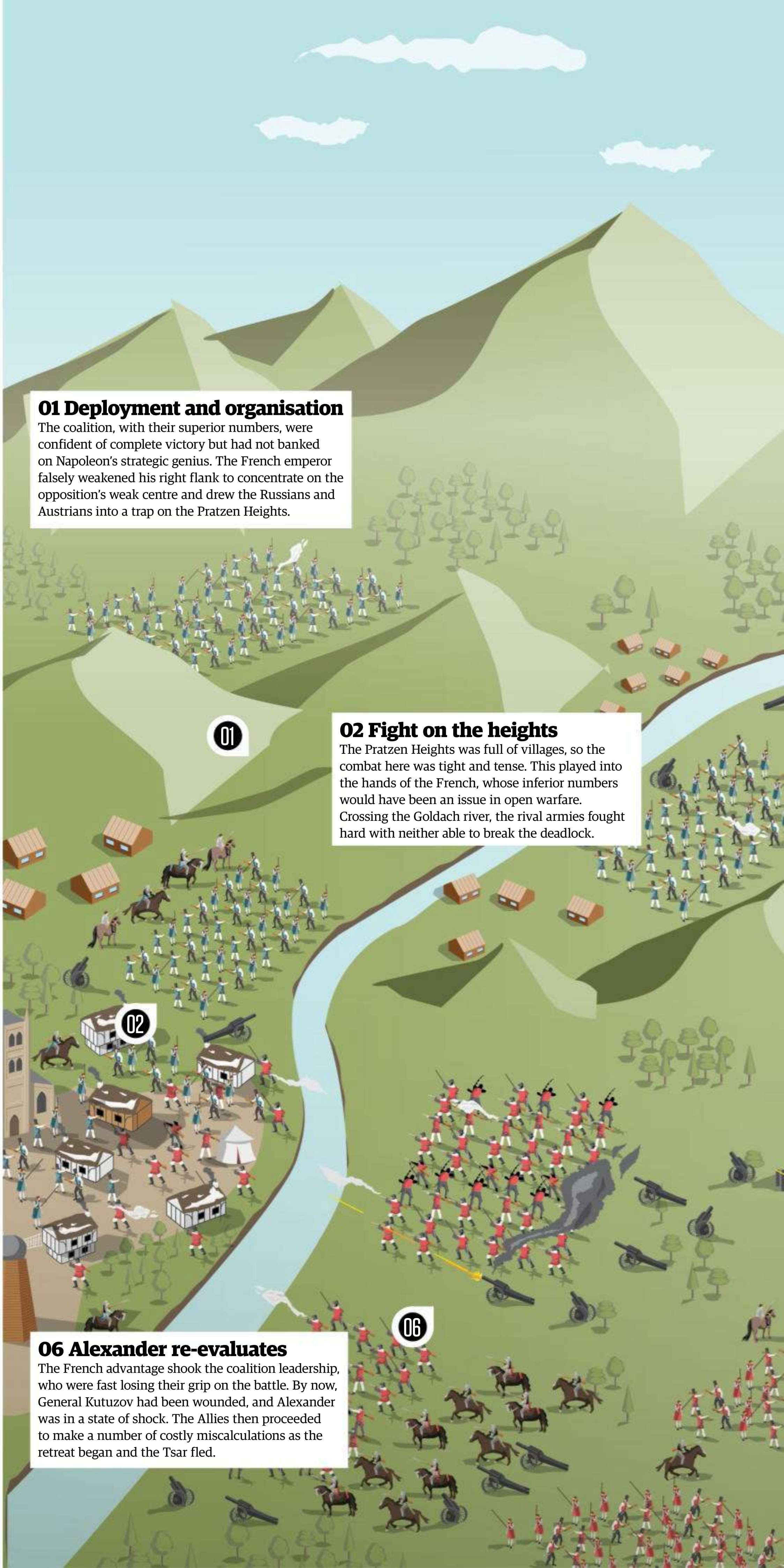
Return to the Heights

Back on the right flank, ferocious man-to-man fighting meant the French had now occupied the heights, but were unable to press home their advantage as the coalition armies fought back bravely. Both sides were wielding primitive firearms, with the most popular being the .69 calibre smoothbore musket. This weapon was inaccurate and quite ineffective, with many shots not hitting the target sometimes resulting in friendly fire. This meant much of the battle saw fierce hand-to-hand fighting.

Using both bayonets and sabres, Austerlitz was a ferocious battle, with neither side holding back. The close-quarter fighting was backed up by artillery barrages from both sides. Although the allies had many more guns at their disposal, the organisation of the French troops meant their shots were more effective and frequent. This lack of cohesion in the coalition also meant that the powerful Austrian cavalry could not be utilised effectively, and was often found too far to the rear to do any lasting damage to the French lines. In the latter stages of the battle, the Tsar saw that victory was becoming more and more unlikely, so fled the field. It was also at this time that allied General Kutuzov received a wound and had to be treated in the safety of a reserve unit. The coalition was now leaderless, and unable to co-ordinate effective attacks. An unsupported Russian Uhlan attack on the north flank that suffered 400 casualties demonstrated this.

Behind the Russian and Austrian regiments lay a number of frozen ponds known as the Satschan Mere. As the French piled forward, the allies had no option but to flee across the ice. Saddled with heavy artillery and the remaining horses, the winter lake could not hold the weight, and as the French drew near, many fell into the freezing water and became the victim of the sub-zero temperatures. The remainder of the troops were bombarded by artillery or taken prisoner as soon as they reached the lake's shores.

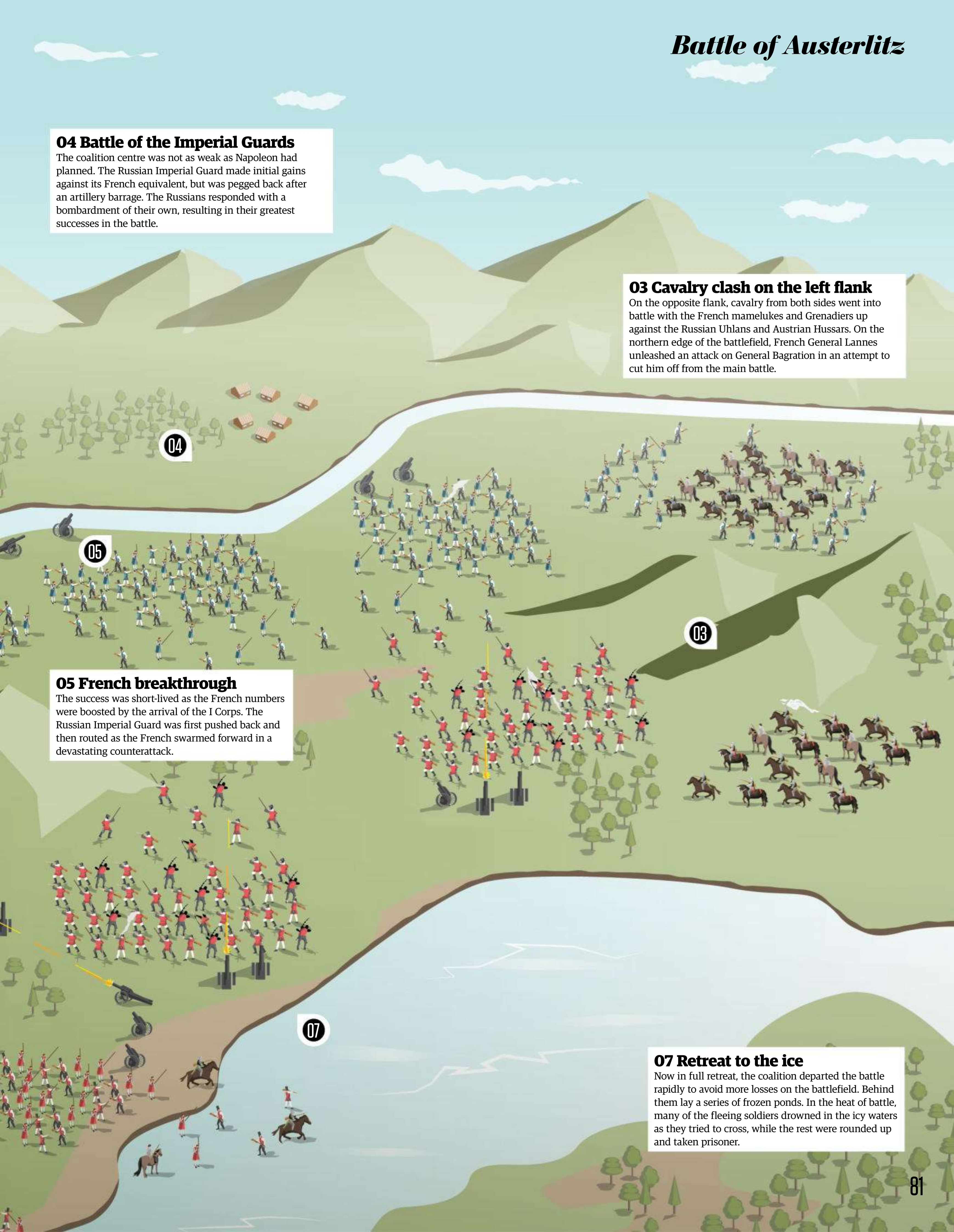
Contemporary accounts have claimed that the number of allied deaths in the Satschan Mere were



01 Deployment and organisation
The coalition, with their superior numbers, were confident of complete victory but had not banked on Napoleon's strategic genius. The French emperor falsely weakened his right flank to concentrate on the opposition's weak centre and drew the Russians and Austrians into a trap on the Pratzen Heights.

02 Fight on the heights
The Pratzen Heights was full of villages, so the combat here was tight and tense. This played into the hands of the French, whose inferior numbers would have been an issue in open warfare. Crossing the Goldach river, the rival armies fought hard with neither able to break the deadlock.

06 Alexander re-evaluates
The French advantage shook the coalition leadership, who were fast losing their grip on the battle. By now, General Kutuzov had been wounded, and Alexander was in a state of shock. The Allies then proceeded to make a number of costly miscalculations as the retreat began and the Tsar fled.



04 Battle of the Imperial Guards

The coalition centre was not as weak as Napoleon had planned. The Russian Imperial Guard made initial gains against its French equivalent, but was pegged back after an artillery barrage. The Russians responded with a bombardment of their own, resulting in their greatest successes in the battle.

03 Cavalry clash on the left flank

On the opposite flank, cavalry from both sides went into battle with the French mamelukes and Grenadiers up against the Russian Uhlans and Austrian Hussars. On the northern edge of the battlefield, French General Lannes unleashed an attack on General Bagration in an attempt to cut him off from the main battle.

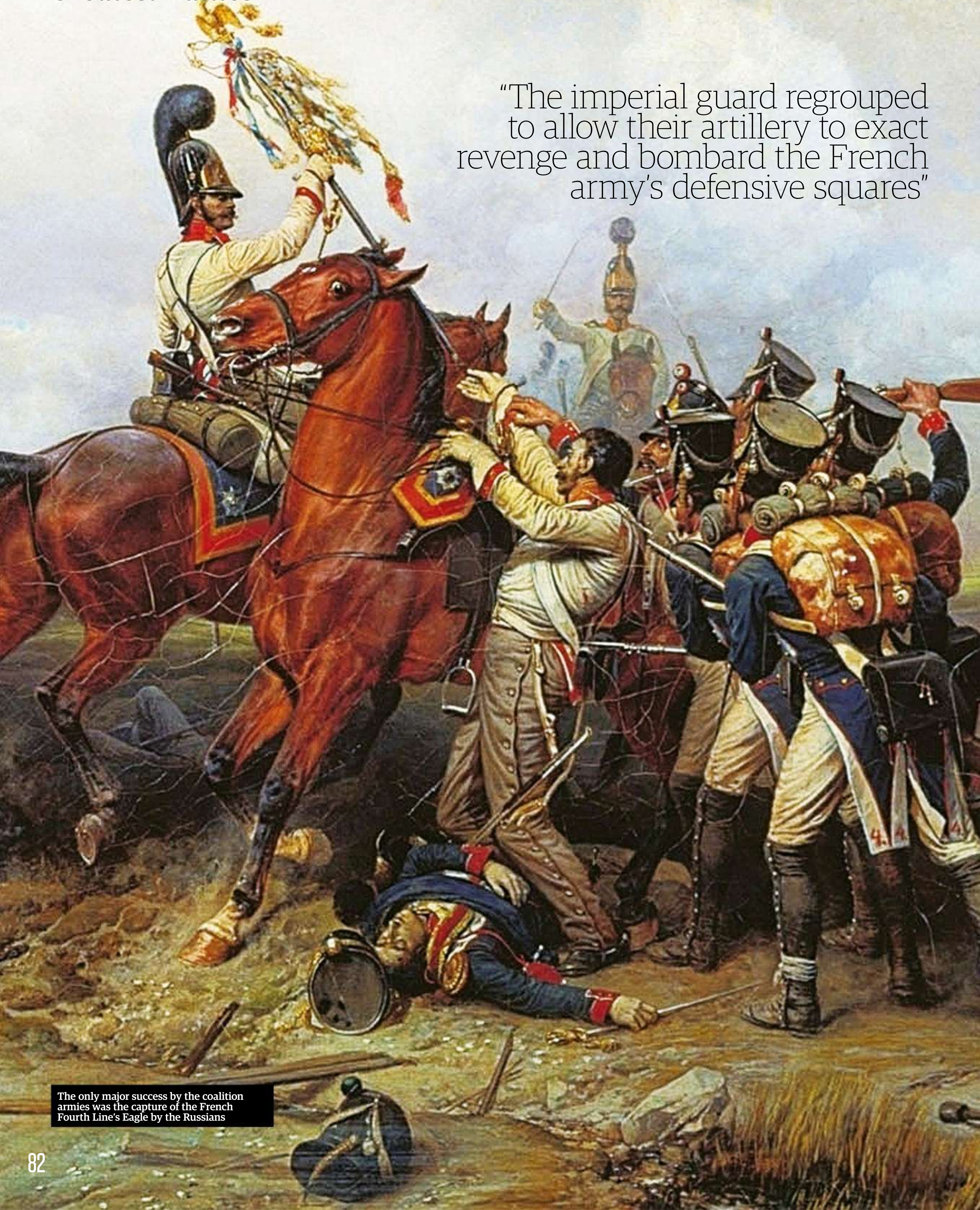
05 French breakthrough

The success was short-lived as the French numbers were boosted by the arrival of the I Corps. The Russian Imperial Guard was first pushed back and then routed as the French swarmed forward in a devastating counterattack.

07 Retreat to the ice

Now in full retreat, the coalition departed the battle rapidly to avoid more losses on the battlefield. Behind them lay a series of frozen ponds. In the heat of battle, many of the fleeing soldiers drowned in the icy waters as they tried to cross, while the rest were rounded up and taken prisoner.

“The imperial guard regrouped to allow their artillery to exact revenge and bombard the French army’s defensive squares”



The only major success by the coalition armies was the capture of the French Fourth Line’s Eagle by the Russians greatly exaggerated, but nonetheless, the coalition divisions were scattered and leaderless, and defeat was now almost inevitable. 11,000 Russians and 4,000 Austrians lay dead in the mud as a victorious Grande Armée mopped up the remaining coalition soldiers on the battlefield. 12,000 soldiers were captured, and the French helped themselves to 180 cannons from the Russian artillery. The weary French could now rest as the Russians retreated back to their homeland and the Austrians surrendered to their French enemy.

The aftermath

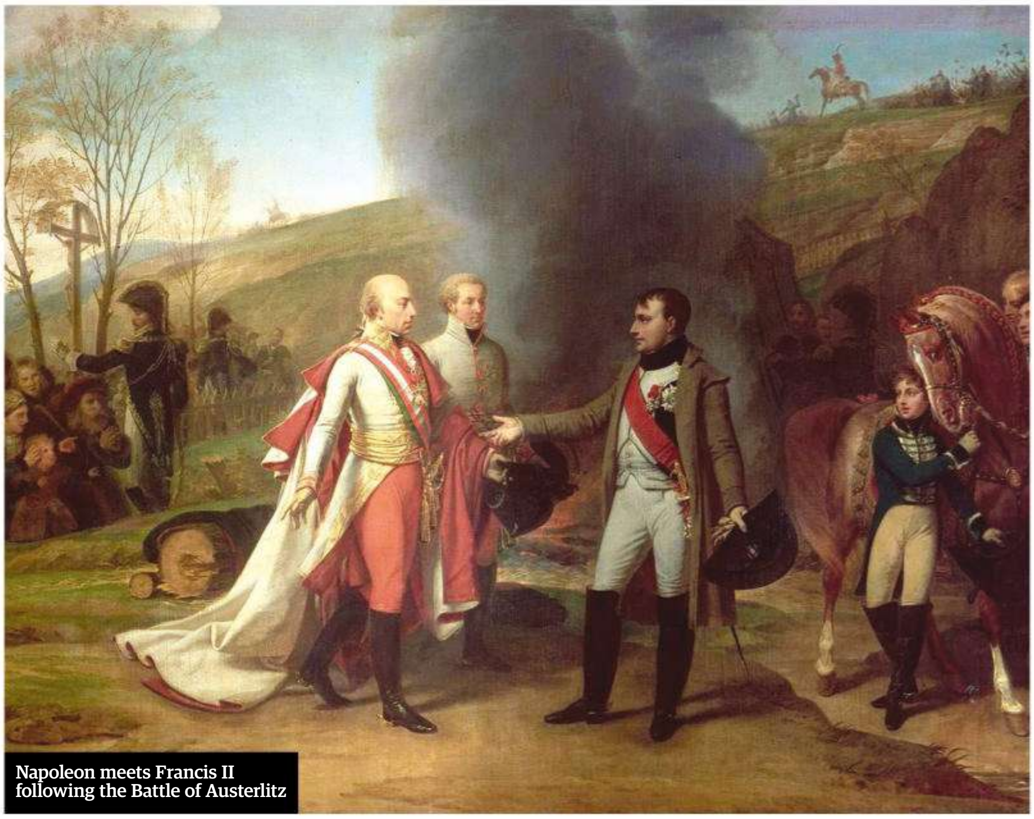
Napoleon may not have defeated his adversaries as comprehensively as he would have liked, but he out-thought and out-fought both the Austrians and Russians. His triumph was so great that many see the victory as when the Emperor began to lose touch with reality and began to concoct more ambitious ideas for his own Napoleonic Europe.

On the evening of 2 December, Johann I Joseph, Prince of Liechtenstein, rode into the French encampment to negotiate a peace agreement. The hierarchy of the Grande Armée agreed, and Napoleon and Francis met two days later. After extended discussions, the result was the Peace of Pressburg. The treaty was a necessity for Austria, who had seen their lands taken and army in ruins, but the agreement greatly benefitted the First French Republic. France now had Trieste and Dalmatia under its rule, as well as a vast area east of the Rhine that bordered Bavarian and Prussian lands. Napoleon was keen to appease Prussia, so they did not enter into a conflict with the French. As a result, he allowed his defeated foe free reign over Hanover.

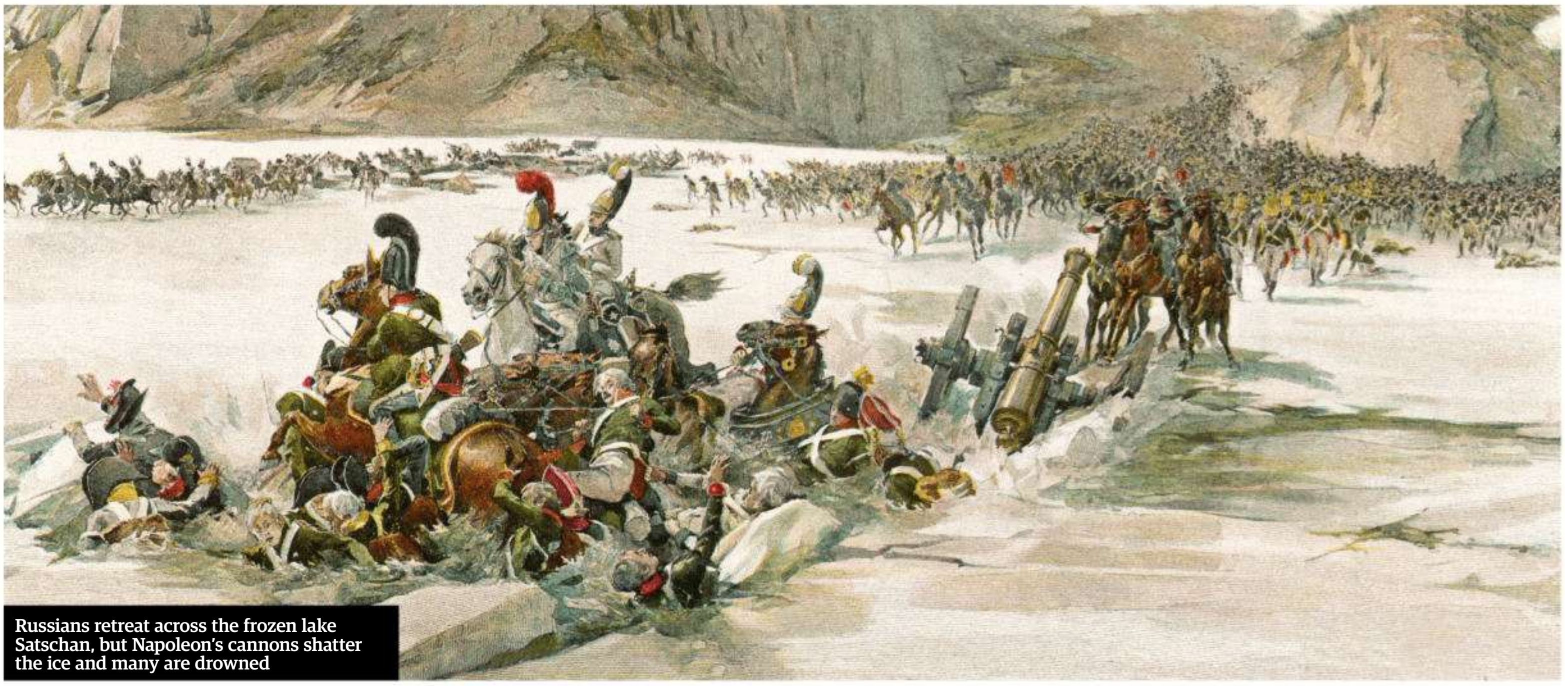
The Austrians fared much worse than any other nation, and were forced to pay 40 million Francs in reparations. Most significantly, the Holy Roman Empire dissolved after 1,000 years as a kingdom. The victory of a republican army against a monarchical one was an important turning point in warfare.

In the Russian Army, aristocrats still held the top roles and order was maintained by regular beatings. This meant the officers were often poorly trained, especially in comparison to the Grande Armée, who were well drilled by Napoleon and could easily adapt to new strategies and tactics. There were even reports that Russian general Friedrich Wilhelm Buxhowden was drunk during the battle. With the destruction of the Third Coalition, the political and military structures and attitudes of old had been eradicated.

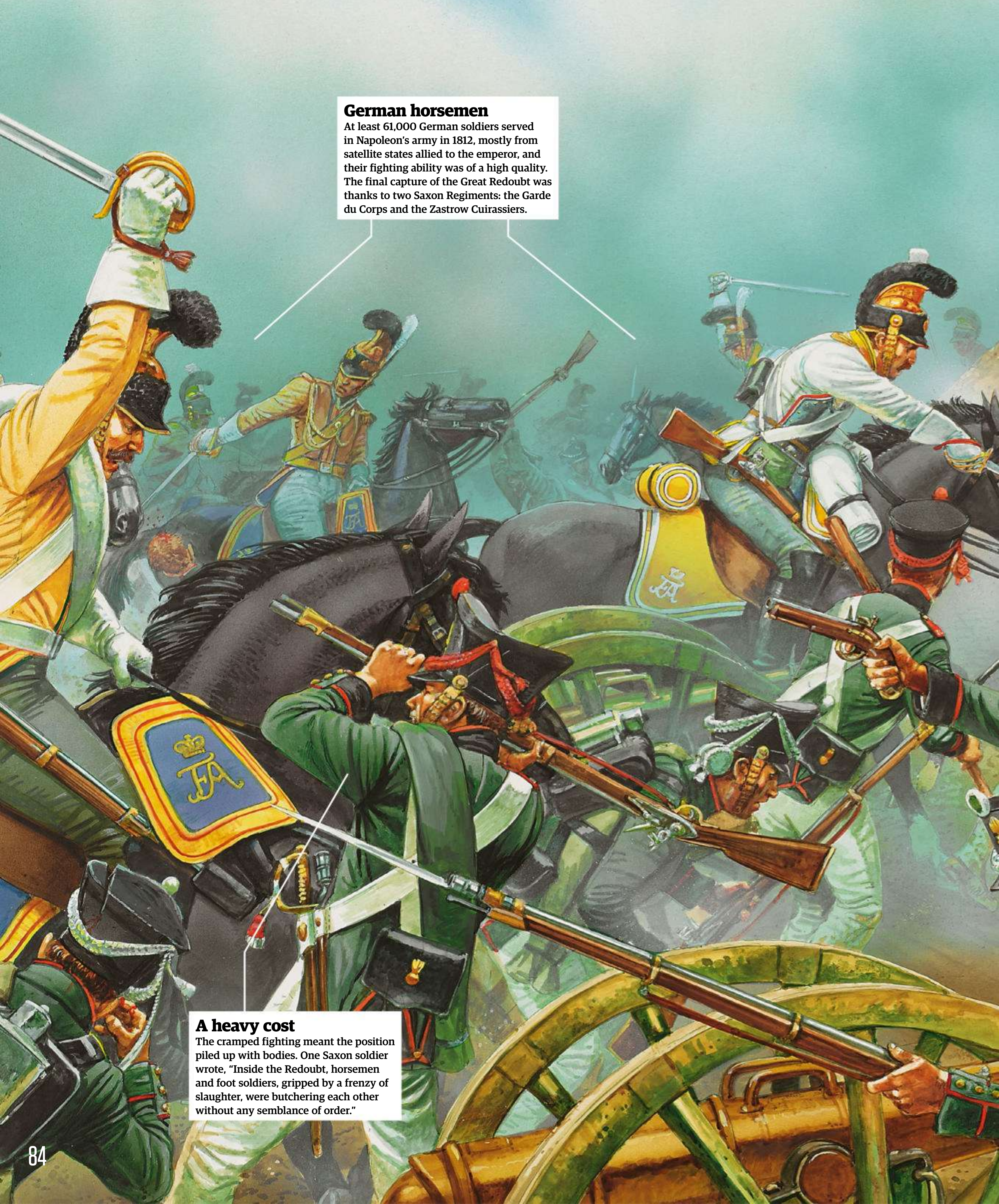
The picture of post-Austerlitz Europe was a bleak one for all, bar Napoleon. The Third Coalition was in ruins, and with the Russians out of the picture, only Britain remained in the way of a confident and powerful French Emperor. The peace was not to last, however, and when the Prussians became more and more sceptical of the French in 1806, Europe was on the road to war once again.



Napoleon meets Francis II following the Battle of Austerlitz



Russians retreat across the frozen lake Satschan, but Napoleon's cannons shatter the ice and many are drowned

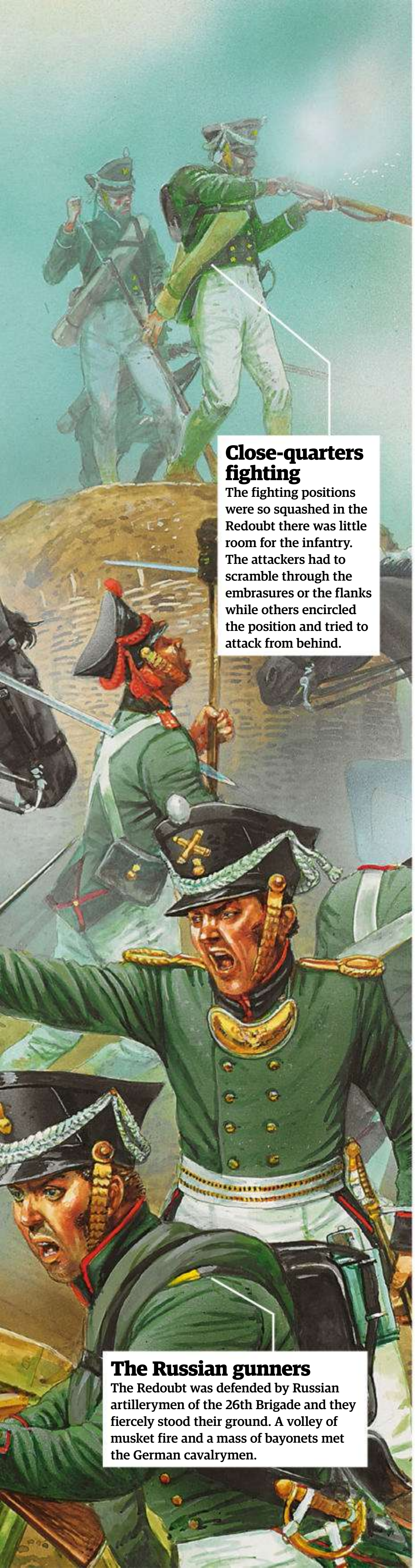


German horsemen

At least 61,000 German soldiers served in Napoleon's army in 1812, mostly from satellite states allied to the emperor, and their fighting ability was of a high quality. The final capture of the Great Redoubt was thanks to two Saxon Regiments: the Garde du Corps and the Zastrow Cuirassiers.

A heavy cost

The cramped fighting meant the position piled up with bodies. One Saxon soldier wrote, "Inside the Redoubt, horsemen and foot soldiers, gripped by a frenzy of slaughter, were butchering each other without any semblance of order."



Close-quarters fighting
The fighting positions were so squashed in the Redoubt there was little room for the infantry. The attackers had to scramble through the embrasures or the flanks while others encircled the position and tried to attack from behind.

The Russian gunners
The Redoubt was defended by Russian artillerymen of the 26th Brigade and they fiercely stood their ground. A volley of musket fire and a mass of bayonets met the German cavalrymen.

BATTLE OF BORODINO

RUSSIA 7 SEPTEMBER 1812

The 1812 Russian campaign was one of the biggest military disasters in history. The French Emperor Napoleon entered Russia with a pan-European army of nearly 700,000 men in June 1812, but when it left the country in December, it had been reduced to just 120,000. Many had died as a result of the relentless Russian winter. However, before the freezing temperatures set in, the French and Russians were engaged in the bloodiest battle of the Napoleonic Wars: Borodino. This horrendous clash exhausted both sides and helped to seal the fate of Napoleon's army.

The battle was fought 110 kilometres west of Moscow near the River Moskva. Napoleon had been advancing eastwards towards the ancient capital in order to impose his political will on Tsar Alexander I, but the Russians had deliberately avoided battle and adopted a scorched-earth policy to deprive the invaders of supplies. Nonetheless, as Moscow loomed into view, political pressure forced the Russian commander Mikhail Kutuzov to make a stand against the "Corsican Ogre". The Russians halted at the town of Borodino and constructed hastily built earthworks called flèches, which would help the artillery effectively bombard the French. When Napoleon arrived, he had already lost thousands of men and divided the Grande Armée across hundreds of miles. The emperor had 130,000 men and more than 500 guns, and faced off against 120,000 Russians with more than 600 guns.

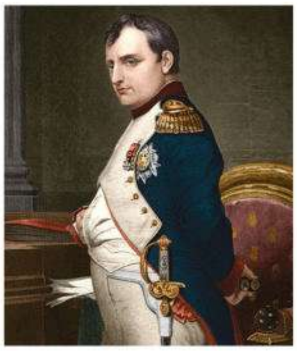
The battle was not to be Napoleon's finest hour. He feared that an attempt to outflank the Russians might enable them to escape, and so he ordered an unsophisticated frontal attack, condemning thousands of troops in the process. Borodino was fiercely fought all day on 7 September 1812 from 6am until nightfall along a five-kilometre front with the French attacking the flèches eight times. The artillery on both sides kept up a relentless bombardment all day, and by noon, the French cannons were beginning to tip the scales. However, a strategy of successive attacks was not enough to overcome dogged Russian resistance. Napoleon himself did not display the military genius that had made him feared throughout Europe. He remained distant from the battle, and at a critical moment refused to commit 30,000 reserve troops, including 20,000 soldiers of the renowned Imperial Old Guard. Had he done so, the battle might have been decisively won, as the Russians had no reserves.

Both sides became exhausted, and the fighting turned to continuous cannonade. At nightfall, Kutuzov withdrew his troops and Napoleon was technically the victor, but at a tremendous cost for both sides. The French had 30,000 casualties while the Russians had 45,000 casualties, including the second-in-command Prince Bagration. Until the Battle of the Somme in 1916, Borodino had the biggest battle casualty rate in a single day ever recorded. One modern historian likened the chaos to "a fully-loaded 747 crashing, with no survivors, every five minutes for eight hours."

Napoleon's pyrrhic victory at Borodino enabled him to occupy Russia soon afterwards, but it proved his undoing. The Russian Army under Kutuzov was able to survive and regroup while Napoleon rotted in a capital that was intentionally torched by its inhabitants. After a month, Napoleon decided to leave, but in the retreat that followed, the resurgent Russians and the crippling winter gnawed away at the Grand Armée until it became a frozen husk of its former self. Napoleon returned to France deeply humiliated, and by 1814 he was forced to abdicate and sent into exile. With hindsight, the 1812 campaign proved to be his undoing and Borodino sowed the seeds for an irreversible military decline.

Grand Armée

TROOPS
126,000-134,000
CANNONS 587



EMPEROR NAPOLEON I

LEADER

As the 'Master of Europe', Napoleon had invaded Russia with a huge army to intimidate the tsar.

Strengths His troops were highly trained and they were confident under his leadership.

Weakness Napoleon was ill and his numbers of soldiers were severely reduced by the trials of the invasion.

GRAND ARMÉE SOLDIERS

UNIT

Primarily French but also from many other European countries, Napoleon's huge invasion army was a force to be reckoned with.

Strengths Highly disciplined, well-trained and loyal to the emperor.

Weakness Far from home and vastly reduced in numbers by the rigours of the campaign.

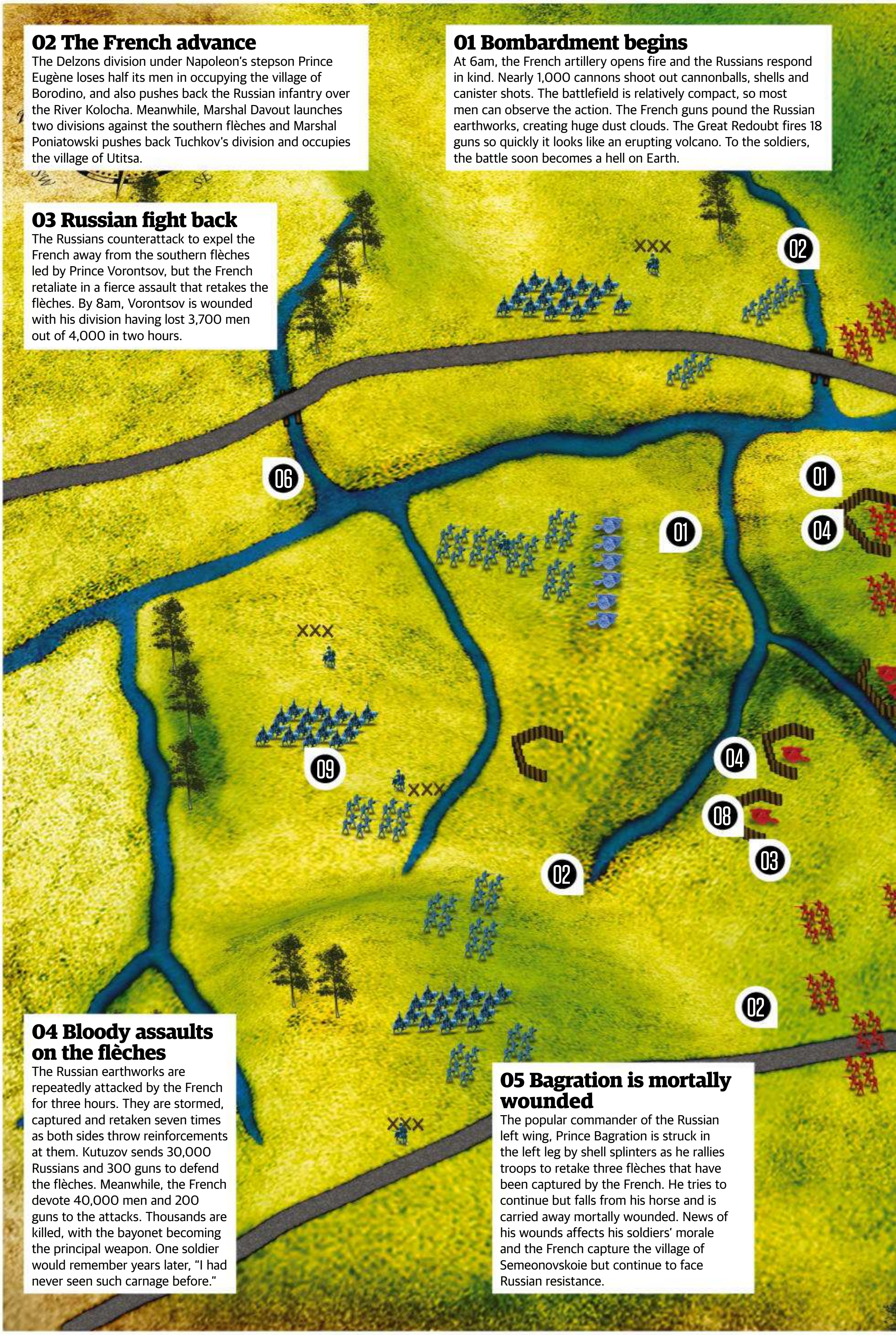
MUSKET MODÈLE 1777

KEY WEAPON

This infantry musket was one of the most widespread weapons on the European continent and more than 7 million were produced.

Strengths It was more accurate than a British Brown Bess musket.

Weakness A low rate of fire and frequently jammed.



01 Bombardment begins

At 6am, the French artillery opens fire and the Russians respond in kind. Nearly 1,000 cannons shoot out cannonballs, shells and canister shots. The battlefield is relatively compact, so most men can observe the action. The French guns pound the Russian earthworks, creating huge dust clouds. The Great Redoubt fires 18 guns so quickly it looks like an erupting volcano. To the soldiers, the battle soon becomes a hell on Earth.

02 The French advance

The Delzons division under Napoleon's stepson Prince Eugène loses half its men in occupying the village of Borodino, and also pushes back the Russian infantry over the River Kolocha. Meanwhile, Marshal Davout launches two divisions against the southern flèches and Marshal Poniatowski pushes back Tuchkov's division and occupies the village of Utitsa.

03 Russian fight back

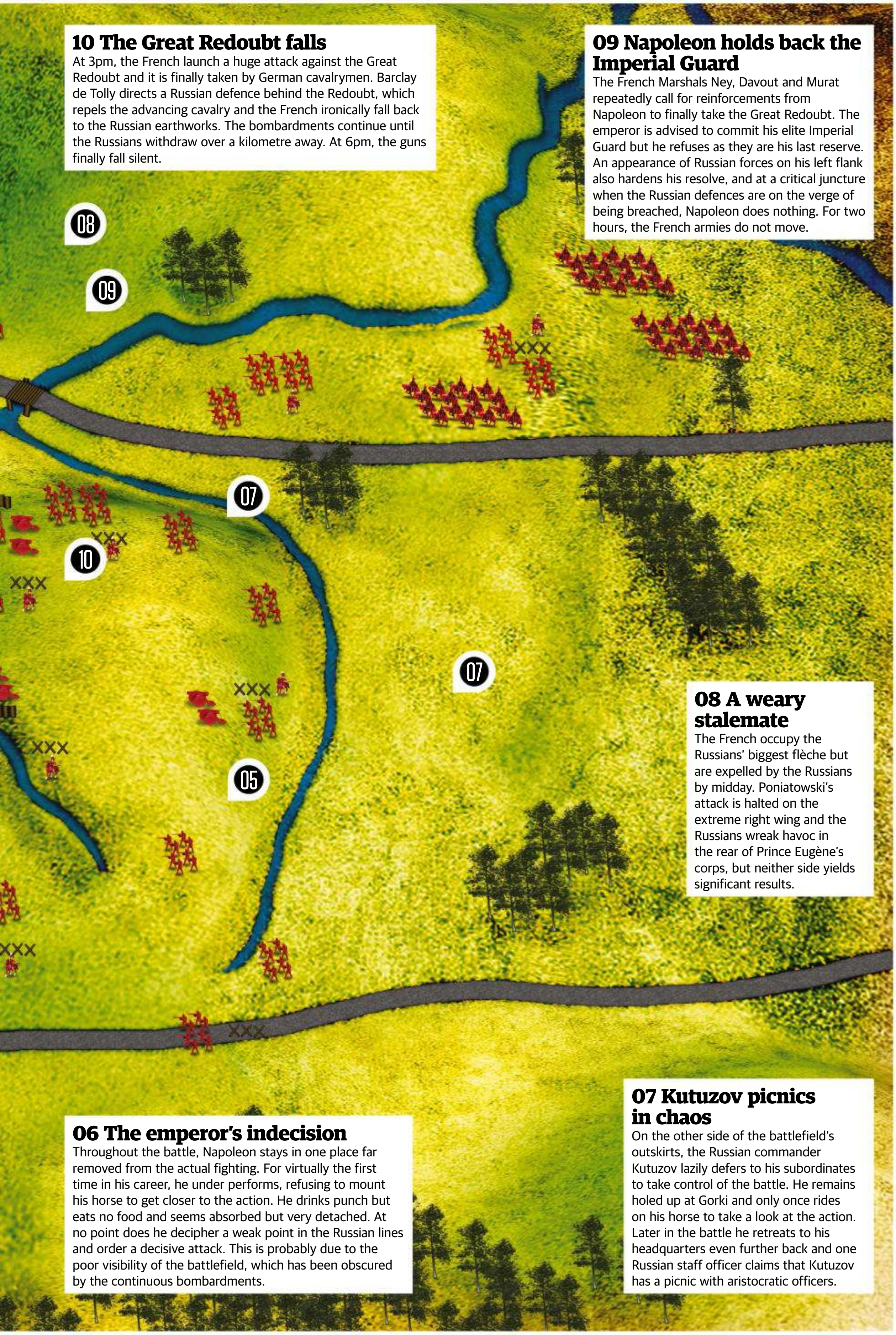
The Russians counterattack to expel the French away from the southern flèches led by Prince Vorontsov, but the French retaliate in a fierce assault that retakes the flèches. By 8am, Vorontsov is wounded with his division having lost 3,700 men out of 4,000 in two hours.

04 Bloody assaults on the flèches

The Russian earthworks are repeatedly attacked by the French for three hours. They are stormed, captured and retaken seven times as both sides throw reinforcements at them. Kutuzov sends 30,000 Russians and 300 guns to defend the flèches. Meanwhile, the French devote 40,000 men and 200 guns to the attacks. Thousands are killed, with the bayonet becoming the principal weapon. One soldier would remember years later, "I had never seen such carnage before."

05 Bagration is mortally wounded

The popular commander of the Russian left wing, Prince Bagration is struck in the left leg by shell splinters as he rallies troops to retake three flèches that have been captured by the French. He tries to continue but falls from his horse and is carried away mortally wounded. News of his wounds affects his soldiers' morale and the French capture the village of Semeonovskoie but continue to face Russian resistance.



06 The emperor's indecision

Throughout the battle, Napoleon stays in one place far removed from the actual fighting. For virtually the first time in his career, he under performs, refusing to mount his horse to get closer to the action. He drinks punch but eats no food and seems absorbed but very detached. At no point does he decipher a weak point in the Russian lines and order a decisive attack. This is probably due to the poor visibility of the battlefield, which has been obscured by the continuous bombardments.

07 Kutuzov picnics in chaos

On the other side of the battlefield's outskirts, the Russian commander Kutuzov lazily defers to his subordinates to take control of the battle. He remains holed up at Gorki and only once rides on his horse to take a look at the action. Later in the battle he retreats to his headquarters even further back and one Russian staff officer claims that Kutuzov has a picnic with aristocratic officers.

08 A weary stalemate

The French occupy the Russians' biggest flèche but are expelled by the Russians by midday. Poniatowski's attack is halted on the extreme right wing and the Russians wreak havoc in the rear of Prince Eugène's corps, but neither side yields significant results.

09 Napoleon holds back the Imperial Guard

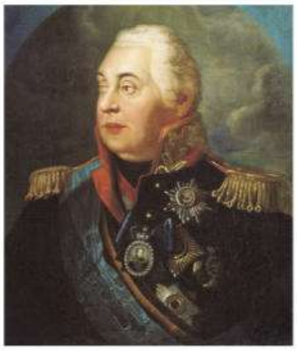
The French Marshals Ney, Davout and Murat repeatedly call for reinforcements from Napoleon to finally take the Great Redoubt. The emperor is advised to commit his elite Imperial Guard but he refuses as they are his last reserve. An appearance of Russian forces on his left flank also hardens his resolve, and at a critical juncture when the Russian defences are on the verge of being breached, Napoleon does nothing. For two hours, the French armies do not move.

10 The Great Redoubt falls

At 3pm, the French launch a huge attack against the Great Redoubt and it is finally taken by German cavalrymen. Barclay de Tolly directs a Russian defence behind the Redoubt, which repels the advancing cavalry and the French ironically fall back to the Russian earthworks. The bombardments continue until the Russians withdraw over a kilometre away. At 6pm, the guns finally fall silent.

Imperial Russian Army

TROOPS
154,000-158,000
CANNONS 624



MIKHAIL KUTUZOV

LEADER

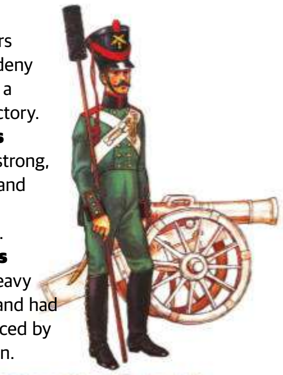
Field Marshal Kutuzov was almost 67 years old at Borodino and had been in the Russian Army since 1759.

Strengths Kutuzov was physically brave, experienced and popular with his men.

Weakness Lethargic, past his prime and slow on the uptake at Borodino.

RUSSIAN ARTILLERYMEN

UNIT



The gunners helped to deny the French a decisive victory.

Strengths Physically strong, dedicated and formidable opponents.

Weakness Incurred heavy casualties and had to be replaced by infantrymen.

CANNON

KEY WEAPON

The wooden parts of the cannon were painted green and kept highly polished. Artillerymen took pride in the appearance of their pieces.

Strengths Russian artillery pieces were efficient and mobile.

Weakness The sighting piece had to be removed before each shot, which slowed the firing rate.

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BATTLE OF WATERLOO

WATERLOO, BELGIUM 18 JUNE 1815

The bloody culmination of the Waterloo Campaign, the Battle of Waterloo was one of the most explosive of the 19th century, with a British-led allied army under the command of Arthur Wellesley, the Duke of Wellington, defeating a French army under the command of Napoleon Bonaparte and ending the latter's 100-day reign as emperor of France.

The war had begun after Napoleon I returned from exile on Elba (an island off Tuscany) to Paris on 20 March 1815. This set into motion a chain of events that would see Napoleon reclaim his position as emperor, the Congress of Vienna declare him an outlaw and the Seventh Coalition pledge to field a large army to bring his rule to an end.

With hundreds of thousands of soldiers drafted to take Napoleon down, it was only a matter of time before blood was spilt – something that occurred two days prior to Waterloo when Napoleon struck at the Prussian army before it could join up with Wellington's on 16 June.

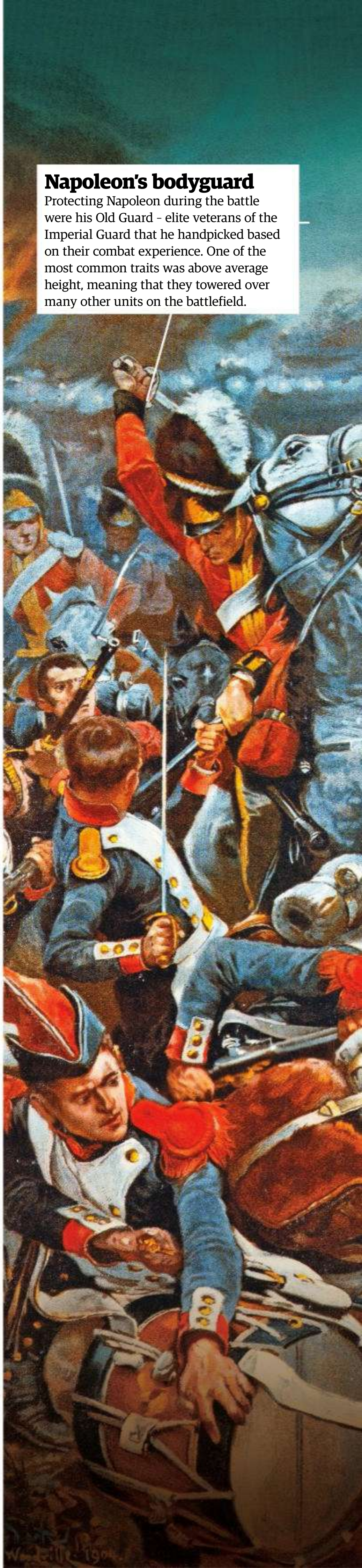
The French ruler did this by splitting his army into three groups, with two dedicated to the Prussians. The following exchange was the Battle of Ligny and saw Napoleon defeat the Prussians by causing their centre to collapse under repeated French assaults. While the Prussians lost men, they were not routed however and – as we shall see – were disastrously left to retreat uninterrupted, with only a cursory French force giving chase.

On the same day as the Battle of Ligny, Napoleon's army's remaining left flank had been engaged with some of Wellington's forces at Quatre Bras, where they had attempted unsuccessfully to overrun the Prince of Orange's position. With the Prussians apparently defeated, Napoleon turned his attention on Quatre Bras, reaching the area the following day. By this point, however, Quatre Bras had been abandoned by both sides; Wellington could not hold it without the Prussians. After catching up with his left flank commander, Marshal Michel Ney, who was pursuing a retreating Wellington towards Waterloo, Napoleon ordered his right flank commander, Marshal Emmanuel de Grouchy, to see off the Prussians more definitively.

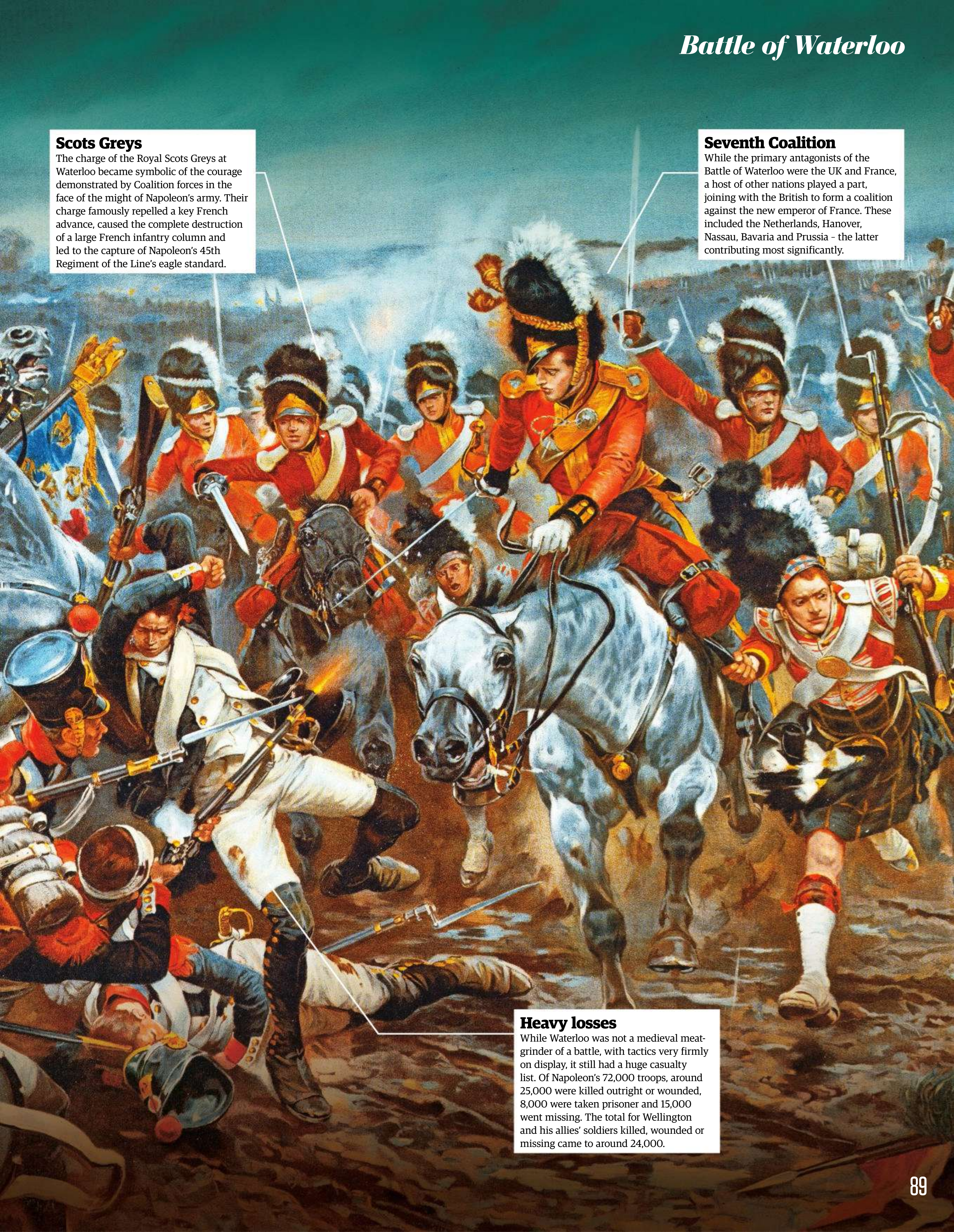
By this time, with Napoleon issuing the order late on the afternoon of 17 June, the Prussians had already made significant ground and regrouped at the town of Wavre – a position from which they could easily rejoin Wellington at Waterloo – and Marshal Grouchy was unsuccessful in catching them. Despite eventually defeating a solitary Prussian Corps at Wavre on 18 June, by this time the Battle of Waterloo was in full swing and Grouchy was unable to take part.

After Napoleon had issued the order to Marshal Grouchy he continued to hunt down Wellington with his remaining forces before making camp south-west of Wellington's position at Waterloo. The scene was now set for the Battle of Waterloo the next day (18 June), which resulted in a famous victory for the Duke of Wellington and a final defeat for Emperor Napoleon.

As a consequence of Napoleon's loss at Waterloo, the French monarchy was restored, with King Louis XVIII regaining the throne on 8 July 1815, while the emperor himself was banished to the volcanic island of Saint Helena in the Atlantic Ocean. Napoleon would live on Saint Helena for a further six years, before passing away in May 1821.



Napoleon's bodyguard
Protecting Napoleon during the battle were his Old Guard – elite veterans of the Imperial Guard that he handpicked based on their combat experience. One of the most common traits was above average height, meaning that they towered over many other units on the battlefield.



Scots Greys

The charge of the Royal Scots Greys at Waterloo became symbolic of the courage demonstrated by Coalition forces in the face of the might of Napoleon's army. Their charge famously repelled a key French advance, caused the complete destruction of a large French infantry column and led to the capture of Napoleon's 45th Regiment of the Line's eagle standard.

Seventh Coalition

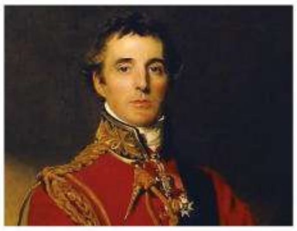
While the primary antagonists of the Battle of Waterloo were the UK and France, a host of other nations played a part, joining with the British to form a coalition against the new emperor of France. These included the Netherlands, Hanover, Nassau, Bavaria and Prussia – the latter contributing most significantly.

Heavy losses

While Waterloo was not a medieval meat-grinder of a battle, with tactics very firmly on display, it still had a huge casualty list. Of Napoleon's 72,000 troops, around 25,000 were killed outright or wounded, 8,000 were taken prisoner and 15,000 went missing. The total for Wellington and his allies' soldiers killed, wounded or missing came to around 24,000.

Seventh Coalition

TROOPS	118,000
CAVALRY	11,000
CANNONS	150



DUKE OF WELLINGTON

LEADER

Rising to prominence in the Napoleonic Wars, Arthur Wellesley remained commander-in-chief of the British Army until his death in 1852.

Strengths Very confident and energetic leader.

Weakness Not the most tactically astute of generals.

INFANTRY

IMPORTANT UNIT

Among the best on the planet, the infantry dug in deep at Waterloo to deny many French cavalry charges.

Strength Versatile troops that could fight at close range.

Weaknesses Easily outflanked by cavalry and vulnerable to cannons.

CANNON

KEY WEAPON

Very destructive, the Coalition's artillery helped slow the French forces and break up their lines.

Strengths Cannons had excellent range and could do a lot of damage.

Weaknesses Needed supporting troops for protection as fairly fragile under fire and few in number.

01 First foray

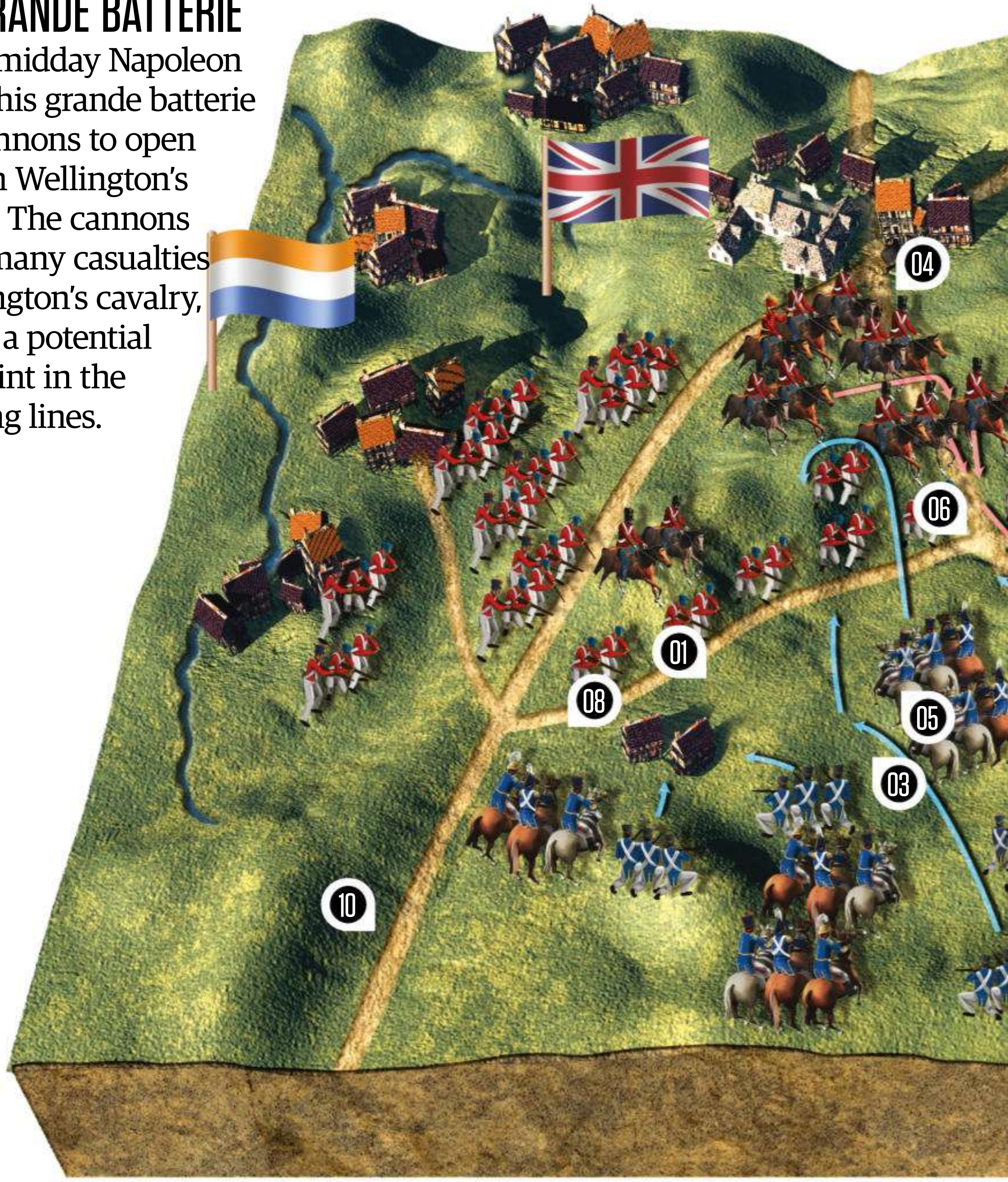
Between 10 and 11.30am on 18 June the Battle of Waterloo began with a French attack on a Coalition position at Hougoumont, a large farmhouse that served as a tactical outpost. This fighting was low key at first with few troops from each side engaged, but by the early afternoon it had become a bloody epicentre for much of the fighting, with the Coalition forces holding out against numerous French assaults.

02 GRANDE BATTERIE

Around midday Napoleon ordered his grande batterie of 80 cannons to open fire upon Wellington's position. The cannons caused many casualties in Wellington's cavalry, opening a potential weak point in the defending lines.

10 French army retreats

With the French left, right and centre now disintegrating, the only cohesive force left available to Napoleon were two battalions of his Old Guard. Despite hoping to rally his remaining troops behind them, the strength of the Coalition's forces left this untenable, and all Napoleon could do was order a retreat. His exit was covered by the Old Guard, many of whom died holding back the Coalition's advance.



03 French infantry attack

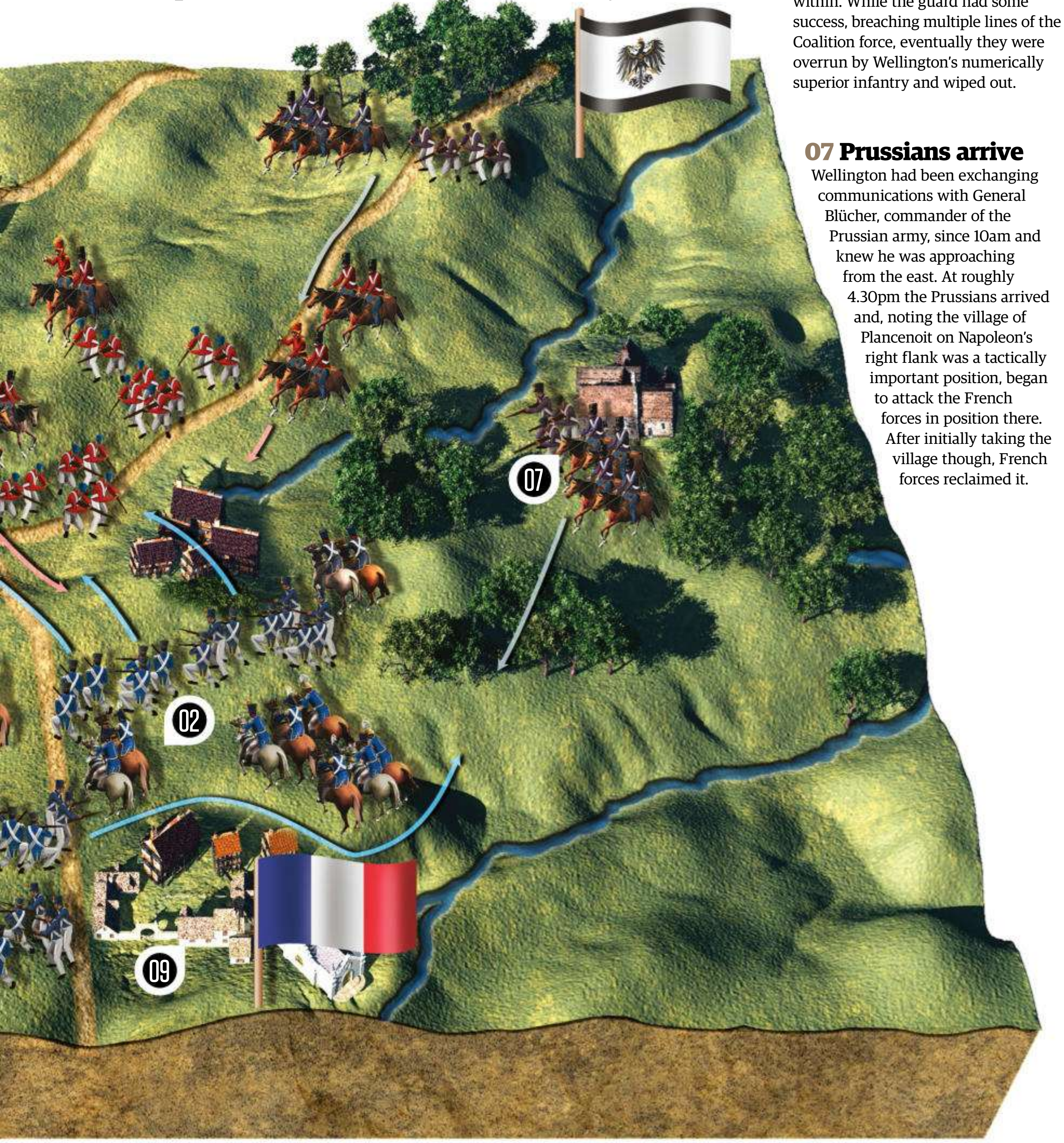
After the Coalition's lines had been weakened, Napoleon began his attack proper, with numerous infantry corps advancing. The initial fighting went the way of the French, with the left's infantry pressing Wellington's forces back. However, just when it looked like Napoleon would make a decisive break, he was informed that Prussian troops were fast approaching. He tried to send word to Marshal Grouchy to engage with them, but his commander was in Wavre.

04 British heavy cavalry attack

Seeing their infantry was about to buckle, Wellington's First and Second Brigade of heavy cavalry charged and smashed into the French infantry. By the time they reached the bottom of the hill, they had completely halted the infantry's advance. In doing so, however, they had left themselves exposed and without backup.

09 PLANCENOIT RECAPTURED

The Prussian army retook Plancenoit and targeted Napoleon's right flank, giving Wellington the upper hand. The Old Guard who had been supporting the French position at Plancenoit beat a hasty retreat.



08 Imperial Guard attacks Wellington

With his forces temporarily holding off the Prussians at Plancenoit, Napoleon went on one last major offensive. He sent the supposedly undefeatable Imperial Guard into Wellington's army's centre in an attempt to break through and attack his flanks from within. While the guard had some success, breaching multiple lines of the Coalition force, eventually they were overrun by Wellington's numerically superior infantry and wiped out.

07 Prussians arrive

Wellington had been exchanging communications with General Blücher, commander of the Prussian army, since 10am and knew he was approaching from the east. At roughly 4.30pm the Prussians arrived and, noting the village of Plancenoit on Napoleon's right flank was a tactically important position, began to attack the French forces in position there. After initially taking the village though, French forces reclaimed it.

05 Napoleon counters

With the Coalition's heavy cavalry now facing squares of French infantry to the front and with no support, Napoleon ordered a counterattack, dispatching his cuirassier and lancer regiments from his own cavalry division. A massive central battle ensued, with cavalry, infantry and artillery all involved. While Napoleon's cavalry regiments took out much of the Coalition's heavy cavalry, they could not wipe them out. Napoleon also dispatched troops to intercept the Prussians.

06 Stalemate

At the heart of the battle, Coalition and French squares then undertook a series of exchanges. All the while cannon and musket fire continued to rain down from all sides and, aside from one more combined arms assault by the French on the centre-right of Wellington's lines, a general mêlée ensued, with each side seeing their numbers steadily chipped away.

France

TROOPS 72,000

CAVALRY 14,000

CANNONS 250

NAPOLEON BONAPARTE

LEADER

Emperor Bonaparte became famous for his tactical genius, enabling him to take over much of central Europe.

Strengths A savvy strategist with plenty of battle experience.

Weaknesses Erratic; he took a detached approach to fighting.

CAVALRY

IMPORTANT UNIT

French light cavalry was considered the best of its kind in the world and played a large part in holding off the Coalition's heavy cavalry charges.

Strength Fast, agile units capable of easily outflanking the enemy.

Weakness Direct cavalry charges rely on surprise to be most effective.

MUSKET

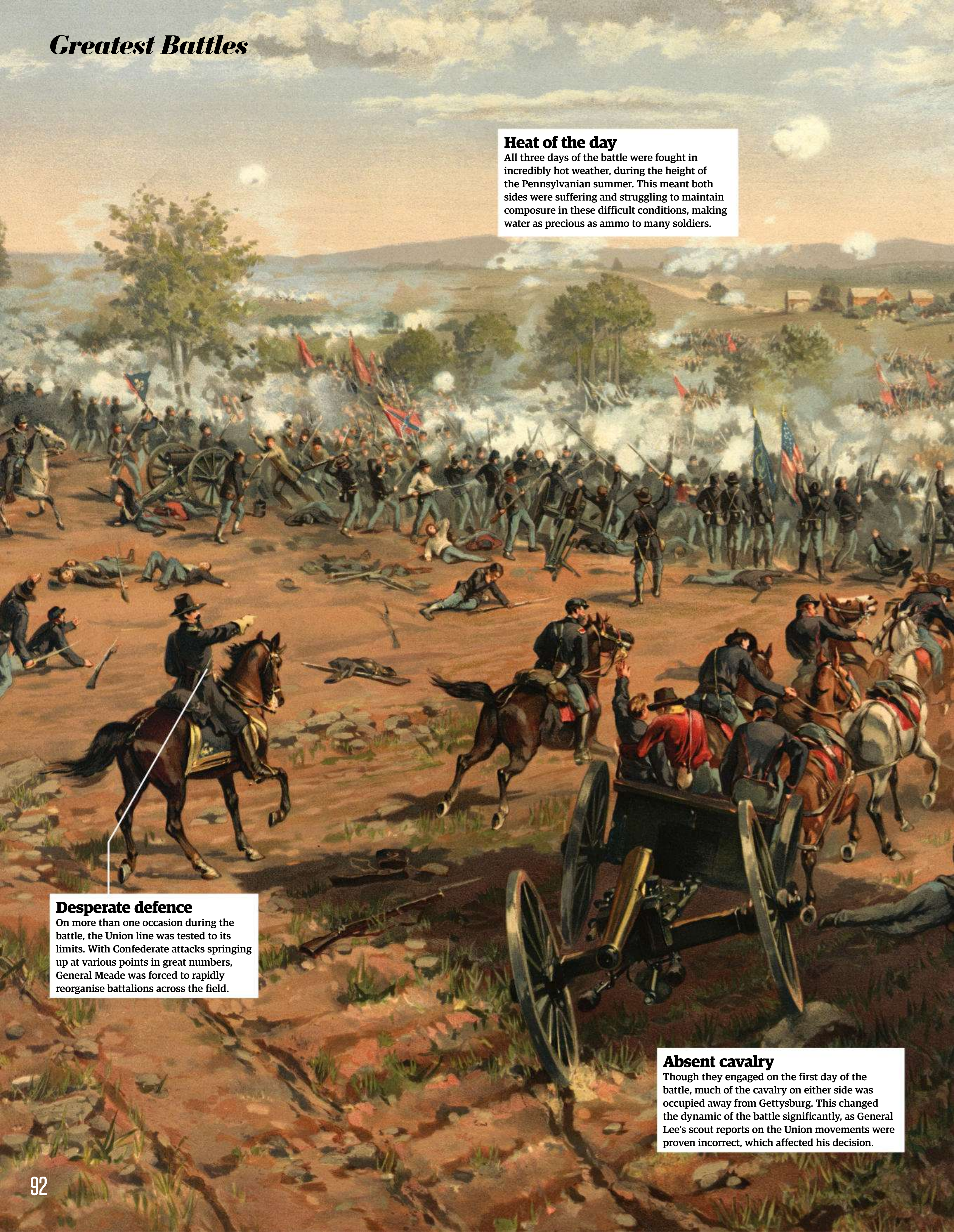
KEY WEAPON

The musket was wielded by Napoleon's Old Guard with deadly accuracy, picking off large numbers of Coalition soldiers at Waterloo.

Strength Excellent medium-range stopping power.

Weaknesses Slow to reload and also poor in hand-to-hand combat.

© Alamy; Sayo Studio



Heat of the day

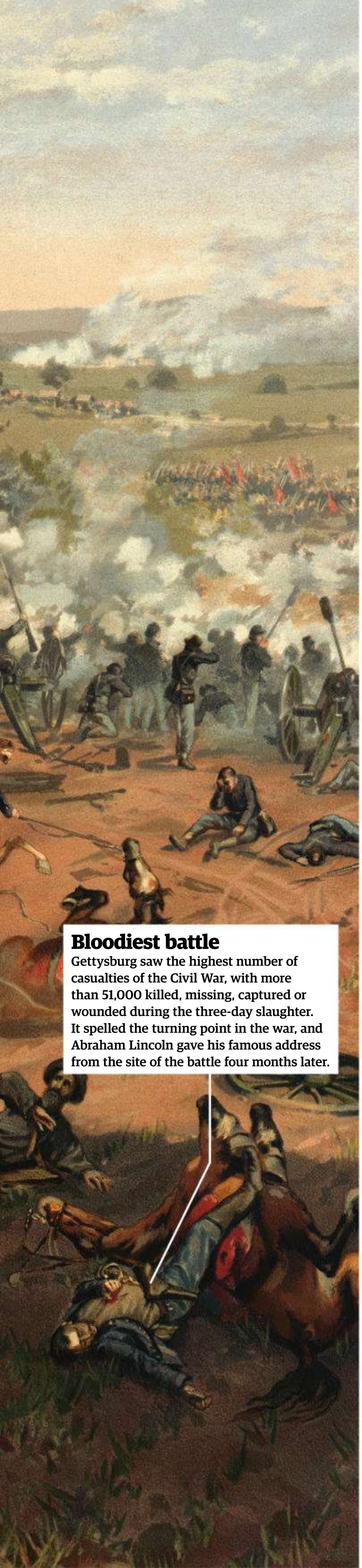
All three days of the battle were fought in incredibly hot weather, during the height of the Pennsylvanian summer. This meant both sides were suffering and struggling to maintain composure in these difficult conditions, making water as precious as ammo to many soldiers.

Desperate defence

On more than one occasion during the battle, the Union line was tested to its limits. With Confederate attacks springing up at various points in great numbers, General Meade was forced to rapidly reorganise battalions across the field.

Absent cavalry

Though they engaged on the first day of the battle, much of the cavalry on either side was occupied away from Gettysburg. This changed the dynamic of the battle significantly, as General Lee's scout reports on the Union movements were proven incorrect, which affected his decision.



Bloodiest battle

Gettysburg saw the highest number of casualties of the Civil War, with more than 51,000 killed, missing, captured or wounded during the three-day slaughter. It spelled the turning point in the war, and Abraham Lincoln gave his famous address from the site of the battle four months later.

BATTLE OF GETTYSBURG

PENNSYLVANIA, USA 1-3 JULY 1863

At noon on 2 July 1863, the heat of the summer day had already sapped the energy from every man - Union or Confederate - unable to find a piece of shade. Nearby, the deserted town of Gettysburg lay eerily quiet after the desperate fighting of the previous day, as the Union men had beat a hasty retreat through its streets and into the hills. General George Meade had steadied his men, forming up a tight defence that he now hoped would be enough to block his enemy's path to Washington, D.C., the political heart of the United States. As shots were heard breaking out towards the Union's left flank, he realised that the attack had begun, but couldn't have any idea just how bloody the day would prove to be.

During the previous month, Robert E Lee, the Confederate's finest commander and arguably the greatest general of the American Civil War, had taken his Army of Northern Virginia, more than 72,000 men, to the north. Penetrating deep into Union territory, he predicted, would boost support for those calling for a peace deal to be brokered between the North and the South. A victory in this invasion so deep into the North would also put great pressure on President Lincoln, and could even allow Lee to march on Washington, D.C., itself.

The relatively small town of Gettysburg, southern Pennsylvania, was only significant in that it saw the convergence of several key roads leading to the south, the north and elsewhere, from where Lee saw an opportunity to spread his army. Major General Joseph Hooker, commanding the Army of the Potomac, had shadowed Lee in his march north, following the rebel army to engage and destroy it. Three days before the battle, however, he was relieved of his command and General Meade was put in his place. The new general's sudden rise through the ranks earned him widespread mistrust among his officers, who questioned his ability to lead them effectively.

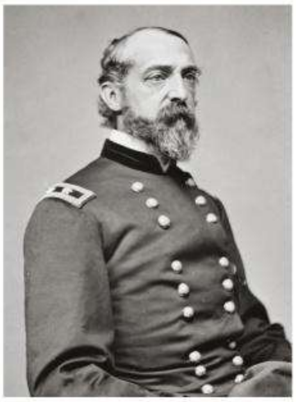
The two armies met at Gettysburg on 1 July, with troops engaging at first in light skirmishes that soon escalated into a pitched battle, as limited Union regiments defended their line against advancing Confederates. With General Meade not yet on the field, Union officers took the initiative to control the defence of Gettysburg, but disaster struck when the senior officer, Major General John F Reynolds, was struck down by a sharpshooter's bullet.

Though they defended bravely, and delayed Lee's troops as much as they could, the Union soldiers were forced to run for their lives through Gettysburg's streets and up into the hills to the south, where a defensive line of artillery had been established. As more reinforcements arrived during the late afternoon and during the night, the position on the high ground was fortified further and the Union generals could only wait to see what General Lee would do the next day.

With Gettysburg surrounded and taken on the first day, albeit with the lives of more men than he would have cared to give, General Lee was now as confident as he usually was of victory. He planned to outflank the Union position, killing its superior position on the high ground and forcing Meade to retreat from the field. The next two days would decide the fate of the United States, and would cost the lives of thousands of Americans.

Union Army of the Potomac

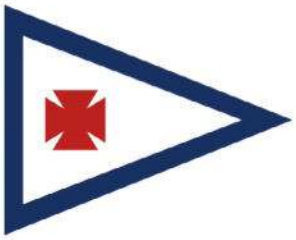
TROOPS 95,000



GENERAL GEORGE GORDON MEADE

LEADER

Meade was appointed general of the army just days before the battle.
Strengths Was able to make full use of his subordinates' skills.
Weakness Without the full backing of his troops, he failed to control many of his officers.



5TH CORPS

KEY UNIT

The stalwart defenders of Little Round Top.
Strengths Drawn mainly from Lincoln's second call for volunteers, these will die for the Union cause.
Weakness Under-supplied and with stretched lines, they faced greater difficulties than just the enemy.

SPRINGFIELD MODEL 1861

KEY WEAPON

The most commonly used rifled musket of the Civil War.
Strengths Long range, along with fairly good accuracy.
Weakness A slight arcing in the bullet's trajectory proved problematic when used by novices.

01 Forming the defensive line

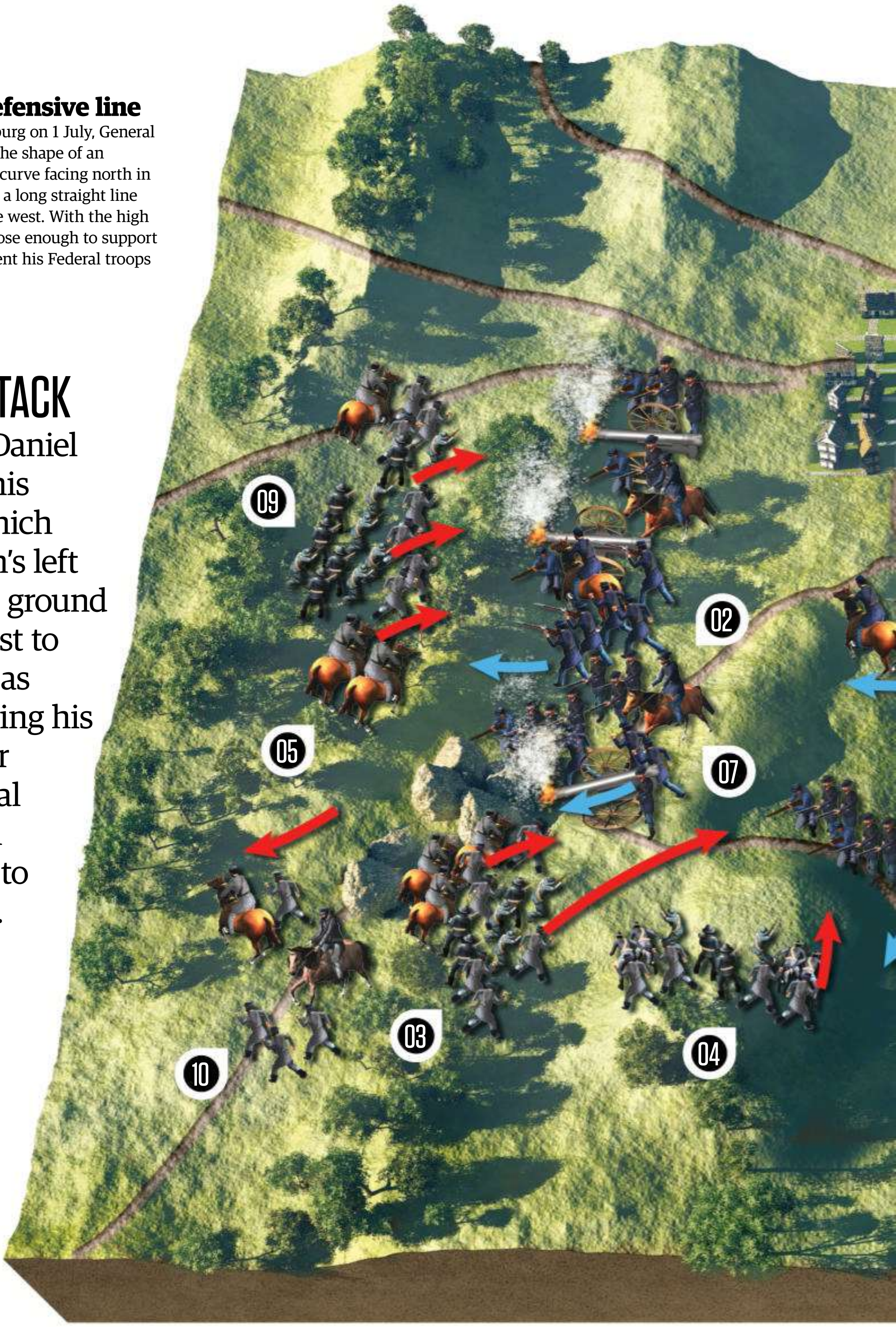
After the retreat from Gettysburg on 1 July, General Meade forms his troops into the shape of an inverted fish hook – with the curve facing north in the direction of the town and a long straight line facing the Confederates to the west. With the high ground and with each unit close enough to support one another, Meade is confident his Federal troops can hold off any attacks.

02 SICKLES MOVES TO ATTACK

Major General Daniel Sickles moves his Third Corps, which holds the Union's left flank, to higher ground towards the west to an area known as Devil's Den, giving his artillery a better position. General Meade sends in his Fifth Corps to support Sickles.

03 Lee orders the first attack

With the bulk of his forces along Seminary Ridge, parallel to the Union's fish hook, General Lee orders Lieutenant General Longstreet to attack the enemy's left flank, General Ambrose Hill is to attack the centre, while General Richard Ewell threatens the enemy's right. Lee plans for his forces to roll up on the Union left, flanking them entirely.

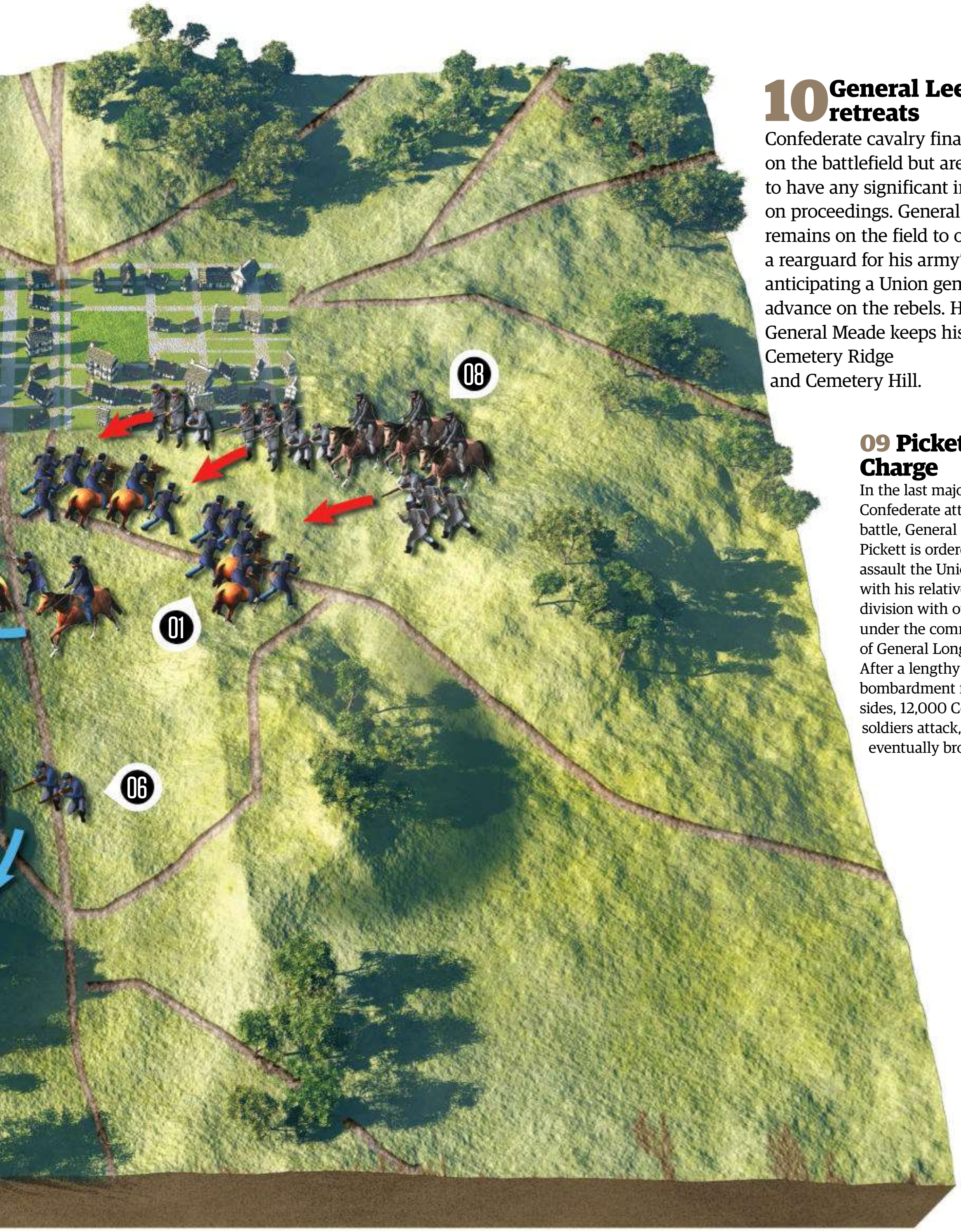


04 Longstreet advances

Moving towards the Union's left flank, Longstreet's men encounter the Union Third Corps at the Devil's Den, a deadly position perfect for sharpshooting. Texas and Alabama regiments move towards Little Round Top to flank the Den.

05 BITTER FIGHTING IN THE DEN

The Devil's Den changes hands several times, with neither side able to hold it for long before being forced to retreat. About 1,800 casualties result from the fighting here. Further to the right of the Confederate attack, Alabama and Texas regiments begin assaulting Little Round Top, but encounter elements of the Fifth Corps General Meade has sent to support Sickles.



10 General Lee retreats

Confederate cavalry finally arrive on the battlefield but are too late to have any significant impact on proceedings. General Lee remains on the field to organise a rearguard for his army's retreat, anticipating a Union general advance on the rebels. However, General Meade keeps his army on Cemetery Ridge and Cemetery Hill.

09 Pickett's Charge

In the last major Confederate attack of the battle, General George Pickett is ordered to assault the Union centre with his relatively fresh division with others under the command of General Longstreet. After a lengthy artillery bombardment from both sides, 12,000 Confederate soldiers attack, but are eventually broken.

06 BATTLE FOR LITTLE ROUND TOP

With ammunition running low and having taken heavy casualties, Colonel Joshua Chamberlain orders his men to fix bayonets and charge the Confederate troops. The attack routs the attacking rebels.

07 The end of the second day

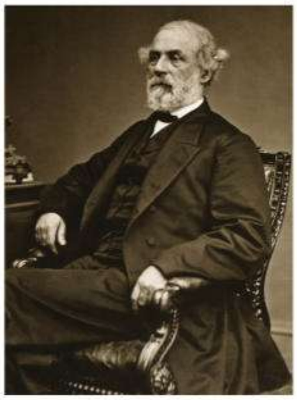
Sickles's Third Corps is pressed hard by the Confederate attacks, with the Wheatfield and Devil's Den finally falling into enemy hands. Sickles is wounded by a cannonball to the leg as his men retreat to Cemetery Ridge, where they hold. A huge gap in the Union centre emerges after the Third Corps retreats, so the line is hastily reorganised to prevent the army being split in two.

08 The armies regroup

As night falls on 2 July, there are more than 14,000 casualties on the battlefield. The Union now holds a defensive line along Cemetery Ridge, Cemetery Hill and south to Little Round Top. In the evening, Confederate attacks on the right Union flank are barely repulsed, as the defences are under-strength from supporting Sickles' position. The next day, more attacks on Culp's Hill and around Spangler's Spring on the Union right flank are repulsed.

Confederate Army of Northern Virginia

TROOPS 72,000



GENERAL ROBERT E LEE

LEADER

One of the finest leaders of the Civil War and a seasoned soldier.
Strengths Substantially experienced in battle.
Weakness Lacked a thorough reconnaissance of the battlefield.

CONFEDERATE SHARPSHOOTERS

KEY UNIT

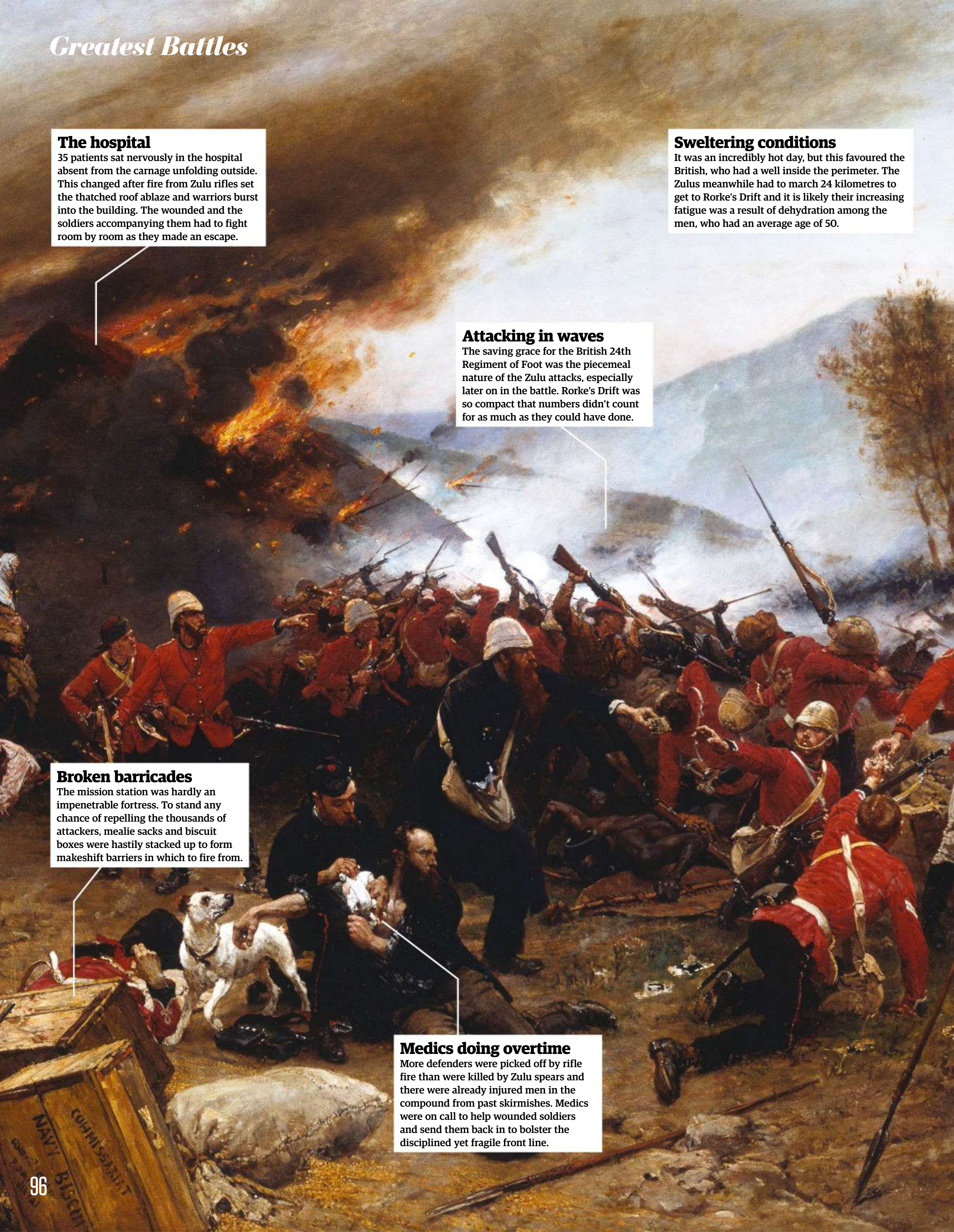
The elite marksmen of the Civil War.
Strengths Precise shooting could take out enemy officers with ease.
Weakness Didn't have the numbers of rank-and-file troops.

WHITWORTH RIFLE

KEY WEAPON

Arguably the world's first sniper rifle, manufactured in Britain.
Strengths Incredibly long range, could hit targets from up to one mile away.
Weakness Far less effective in the hands of a raw recruit.

© Nicolle Fuller



The hospital

35 patients sat nervously in the hospital absent from the carnage unfolding outside. This changed after fire from Zulu rifles set the thatched roof ablaze and warriors burst into the building. The wounded and the soldiers accompanying them had to fight room by room as they made an escape.

Sweltering conditions

It was an incredibly hot day, but this favoured the British, who had a well inside the perimeter. The Zulus meanwhile had to march 24 kilometres to get to Rorke's Drift and it is likely their increasing fatigue was a result of dehydration among the men, who had an average age of 50.

Attacking in waves

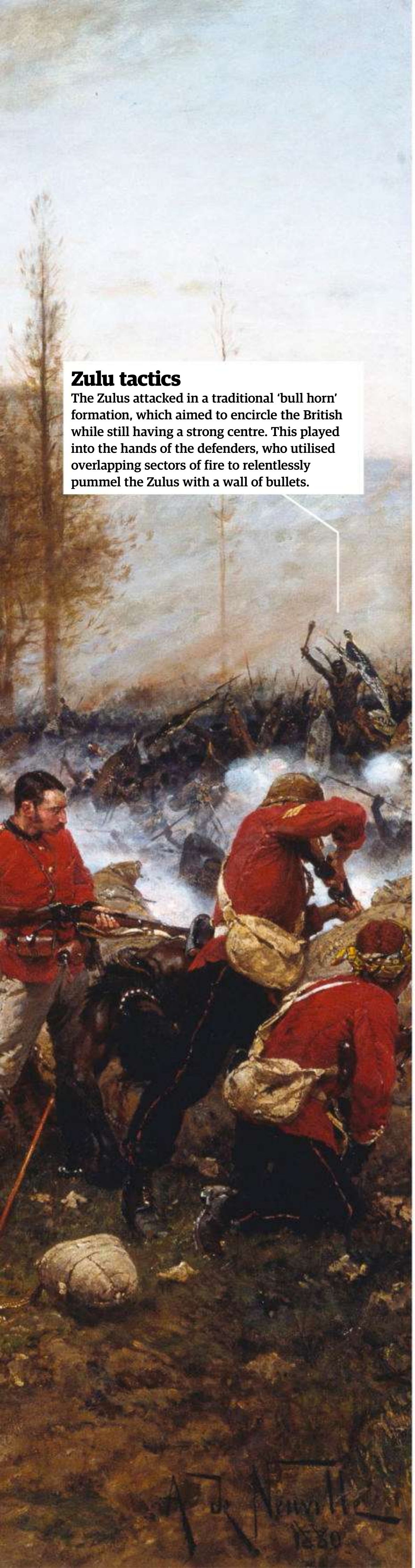
The saving grace for the British 24th Regiment of Foot was the piecemeal nature of the Zulu attacks, especially later on in the battle. Rorke's Drift was so compact that numbers didn't count for as much as they could have done.

Broken barricades

The mission station was hardly an impenetrable fortress. To stand any chance of repelling the thousands of attackers, mealie sacks and biscuit boxes were hastily stacked up to form makeshift barriers in which to fire from.

Medics doing overtime

More defenders were picked off by rifle fire than were killed by Zulu spears and there were already injured men in the compound from past skirmishes. Medics were on call to help wounded soldiers and send them back in to bolster the disciplined yet fragile front line.



Zulu tactics
The Zulus attacked in a traditional 'bull horn' formation, which aimed to encircle the British while still having a strong centre. This played into the hands of the defenders, who utilised overlapping sectors of fire to relentlessly pummel the Zulus with a wall of bullets.

BATTLE OF RORKE'S DRIFT

ZULU KINGDOM, SOUTH AFRICA

22 JANUARY 1879

Immortalised in the movie *Zulu*, the Battle of Rorke's Drift is one of the most famous last stands of all time. Britain had been aggressive in its pursuit of conquering the southern tip of Africa, yet its recklessness and underestimation of the enemy would nearly cost them dear. The Zulus were determined to drive the British out of their homeland, and going against the wishes of King Cetshwayo, his half brother Dabulamanzi advanced on a small mission station known as Rorke's Drift.

The man in charge of the stronghold was Lieutenant John Chard, and the first the garrison of the 24th Regiment of Foot heard of the impending attack was rifle fire in the distance. This was the dying embers of the Battle of Isandlwana, where Queen Victoria's men were being trounced by the natives. Realising the threat of the fast-approaching storm, the camp was fortified with sacks of grain. Fears escalated after the company's numbers were depleted further by units leaving for the relative safety of Helmakaar, a nearby town. Now only a brave 154 remained to grit their teeth, say their prayers and man the barricades.

500 Zulus charged the southern side of the mission station, taking heavy fire from the British rifles. They were driven back this time but they would come again in greater numbers. Using their short stabbing spears, the Zulu tactic was to get in close and personal, but they were repelled time and again by a combination of bullets and bayonets. Some of the attackers wielded rifles, but they were by no means trained marksmen.

It soon became clear that the western side of Rorke's Drift would bear witness to the heaviest of the fighting. The hospital was located here and its thatched roof was quickly set ablaze, and the patients inside were trapped in the inferno. As the Zulus flooded in, the wounded, armed with only bayonets, held the attackers off as others desperately hacked through the stone walls to get to safety.

Night was now beginning to fall and the British soldiers were forced into a small bastion in the centre of the stronghold. As the hospital continued to burn bright, the Zulu assault was unforgiving but the British stood firm. Fighting tooth and nail, the brutal attack was somehow held off, and as the clock struck midnight, the attacks began to subside. This was a relief to the British, who were down to just 600 rounds. They had started with 24,000. Piecemeal skirmishes lasted until the early hours but it soon became apparent that after 12 hours of hell, the company had lived to fight another day.

Zulus were spotted again at about 7am but no attack followed. The loss at Isandlwana and the victory at Rorke's Drift had completely different outcomes, but both contributed to the escalation of the Anglo-Zulu War. 11 Victoria Crosses were handed out to the British soldiers, but it remains a controversial subject. The aftermath of the battle saw hundreds of wounded Zulu prisoners killed and buried in mass graves. Britain also sent in huge reinforcements, so by the summer of 1879 Cetshwayo was defeated. The Zulu Kingdom was then annexed into the empire on which the sun did not set.

British Army

TROOPS 154

LIEUTENANT JOHN CHARD

LEADER

Only arriving three days before the battle, Chard was the highest ranking officer entrusted with defending Rorke's Drift.

Strengths Prior experience of war in Bermuda and Malta.

Weakness Little time or supplies to prepare strong defences.

BRITISH SOLDIER

UNIT

Experienced and loyal to the queen, the English and Welsh defenders would fight on to the bitter end.

Strengths Disciplined and immaculately trained.

Weakness Disheartened by extremely high Zulu numbers.

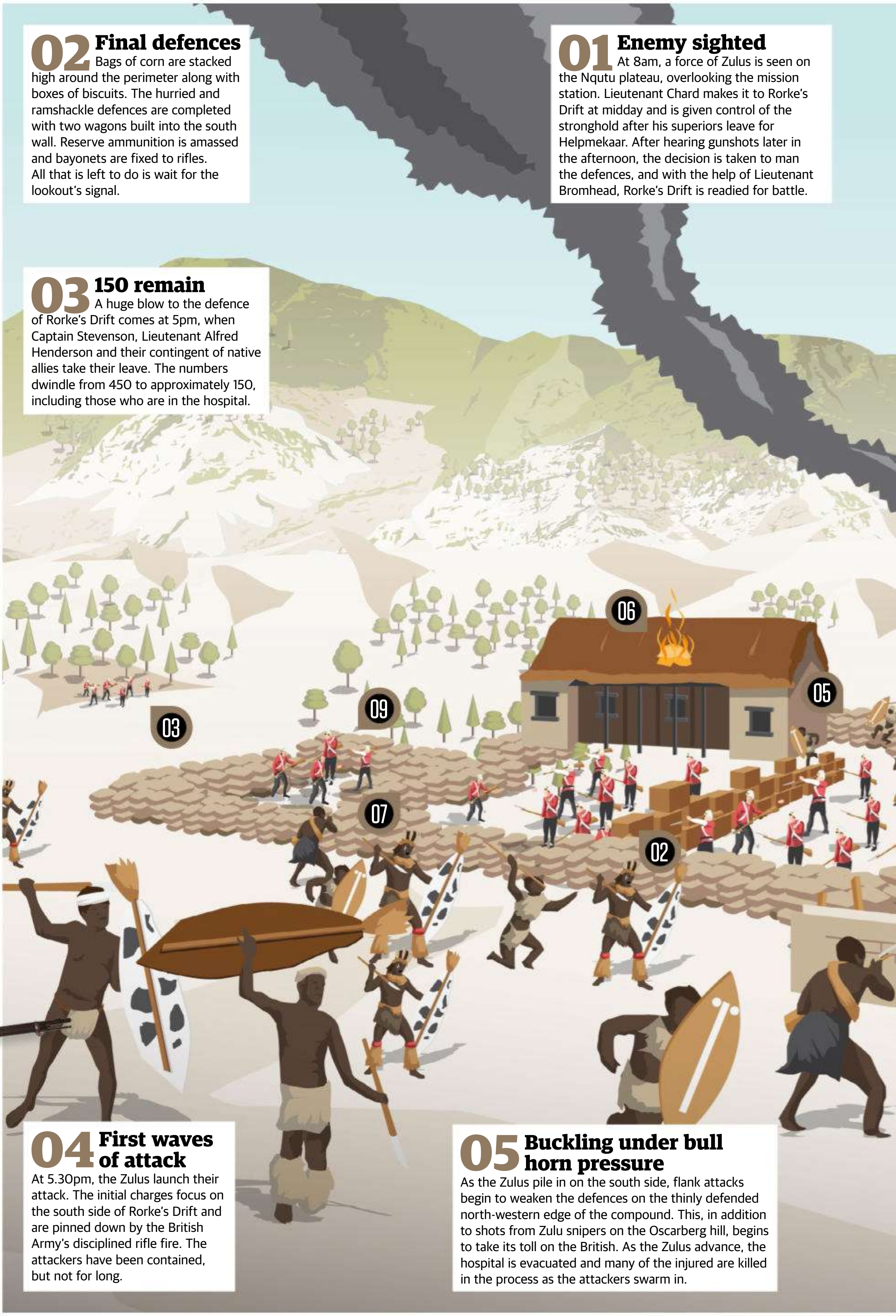
MARTINI-HENRY BREECH-LOADING RIFLE

KEY WEAPON

The weapon of choice for the majority of the British Army was a staple of colonial warfare.

Strengths Superior to any weapon wielded by the Zulus.

Weakness Tendency for cartridges to stick in the firing mechanism.



01 Enemy sighted

At 8am, a force of Zulus is seen on the Nqutu plateau, overlooking the mission station. Lieutenant Chard makes it to Rorke's Drift at midday and is given control of the stronghold after his superiors leave for Helpmekaar. After hearing gunshots later in the afternoon, the decision is taken to man the defences, and with the help of Lieutenant Bromhead, Rorke's Drift is readied for battle.

02 Final defences

Bags of corn are stacked high around the perimeter along with boxes of biscuits. The hurried and ramshackle defences are completed with two wagons built into the south wall. Reserve ammunition is amassed and bayonets are fixed to rifles. All that is left to do is wait for the lookout's signal.

03 150 remain

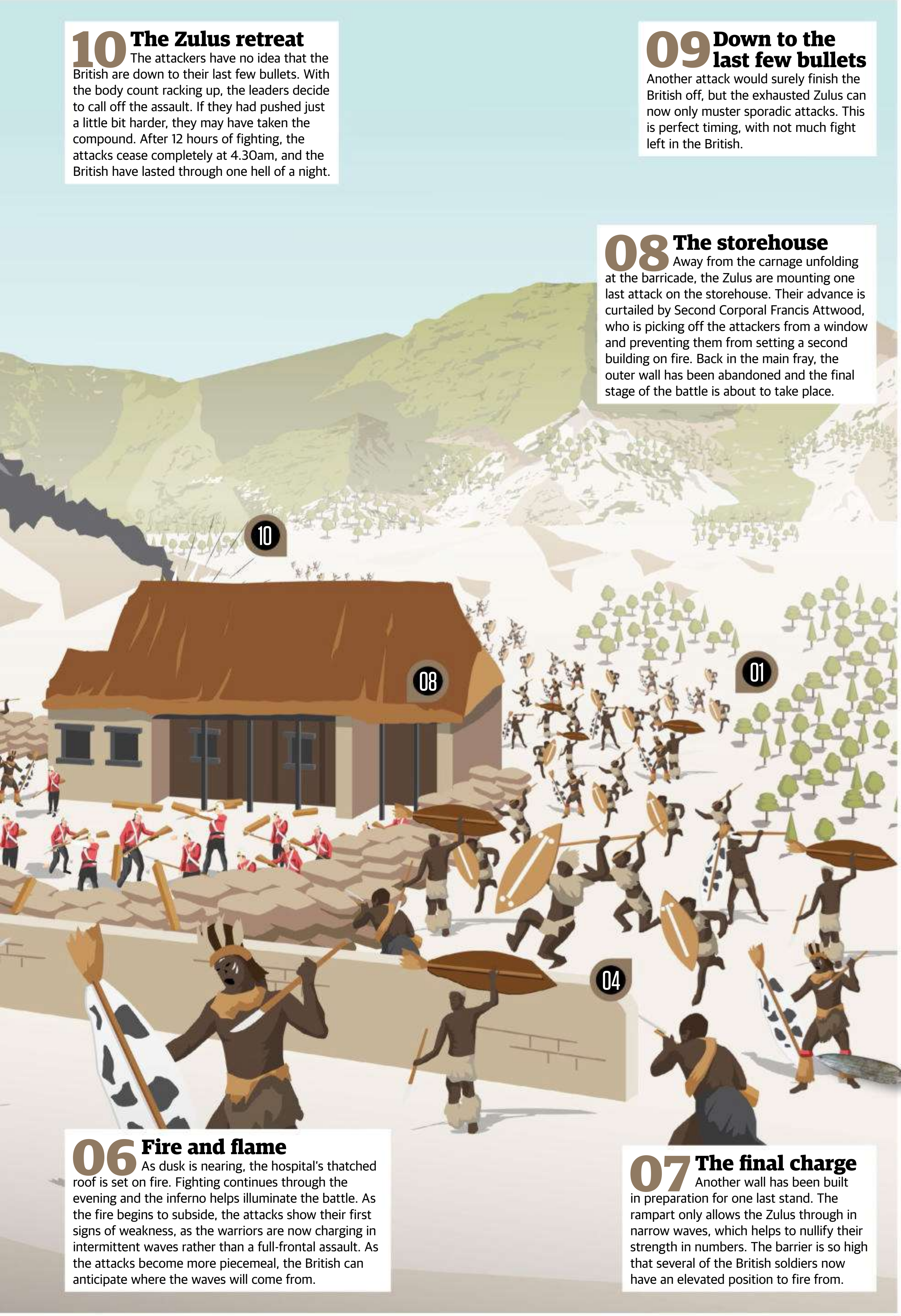
A huge blow to the defence of Rorke's Drift comes at 5pm, when Captain Stevenson, Lieutenant Alfred Henderson and their contingent of native allies take their leave. The numbers dwindle from 450 to approximately 150, including those who are in the hospital.

04 First waves of attack

At 5.30pm, the Zulus launch their attack. The initial charges focus on the south side of Rorke's Drift and are pinned down by the British Army's disciplined rifle fire. The attackers have been contained, but not for long.

05 Buckling under bull horn pressure

As the Zulus pile in on the south side, flank attacks begin to weaken the defences on the thinly defended north-western edge of the compound. This, in addition to shots from Zulu snipers on the Oscarberg hill, begins to take its toll on the British. As the Zulus advance, the hospital is evacuated and many of the injured are killed in the process as the attackers swarm in.



06 Fire and flame

As dusk is nearing, the hospital's thatched roof is set on fire. Fighting continues through the evening and the inferno helps illuminate the battle. As the fire begins to subside, the attacks show their first signs of weakness, as the warriors are now charging in intermittent waves rather than a full-frontal assault. As the attacks become more piecemeal, the British can anticipate where the waves will come from.

07 The final charge

Another wall has been built in preparation for one last stand. The rampart only allows the Zulus through in narrow waves, which helps to nullify their strength in numbers. The barrier is so high that several of the British soldiers now have an elevated position to fire from.

08 The storehouse

Away from the carnage unfolding at the barricade, the Zulus are mounting one last attack on the storehouse. Their advance is curtailed by Second Corporal Francis Attwood, who is picking off the attackers from a window and preventing them from setting a second building on fire. Back in the main fray, the outer wall has been abandoned and the final stage of the battle is about to take place.

09 Down to the last few bullets

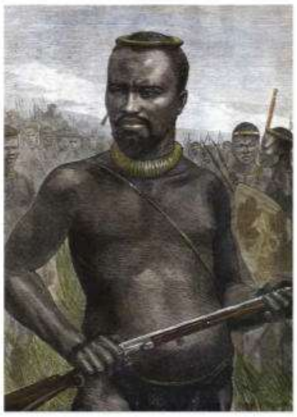
Another attack would surely finish the British off, but the exhausted Zulus can now only muster sporadic attacks. This is perfect timing, with not much fight left in the British.

10 The Zulus retreat

The attackers have no idea that the British are down to their last few bullets. With the body count racking up, the leaders decide to call off the assault. If they had pushed just a little bit harder, they may have taken the compound. After 12 hours of fighting, the attacks cease completely at 4.30am, and the British have lasted through one hell of a night.

Zulu Kingdom

TROOPS 4,500



DABULAMANZI KAMPANDE

LEADER

The half brother of the Zulu King, he defied direct orders for the opportunity to defeat the British at Rorke's Drift.

Strengths Headstrong desire to drive the British from his homeland.

Weakness 'Bull horn' formation ineffectual against British bullets.

ZULU WARRIOR

UNIT

A citizen army called up at times of war. They received their training from the legendary Zulu warrior and king, Shaka.

Strengths Unrivalled skill with an assegai spear.

Weakness Minimal training in wielding firearms.

ASSEGAI

KEY WEAPON

A light spear made of wood with an iron tip that was thrust into an enemy's abdomen.

Strengths Easy to wield. Could be thrown or used in handheld battle.

Weakness Shorter than a bayonet so difficult to get in close.

© Corbis, Edward Crooks

BATTLE OF THE SOMME

NORTHERN FRANCE 1 JULY – 18 NOVEMBER 1916

Morning on another warm summer's day in Northern France's frontline was suddenly interrupted by a surge of explosions that seemed to make the very air pulsate. Detonations of explosives planted deep beneath the earth were the signal that the attack on the German lines was to begin. With shrill whistle blasts all along the line, the British and French troops headed out into no man's land, and the Somme offensive began.

Initially planned solely as a French attack, the Somme offensive was months in the making, and was intended to be Field Marshal Douglas Haig's decisive blow to the German lines. Haig's aim was to force a rapid and devastating advance on the German lines, breaking through the deadlock of the trenches and splitting the enemy's front irreconcilably in two. Not only was it thought that this would this disorganise the German troops, but it could also draw away crucial enemy troops from the French battling a German offensive in nearby Verdun.

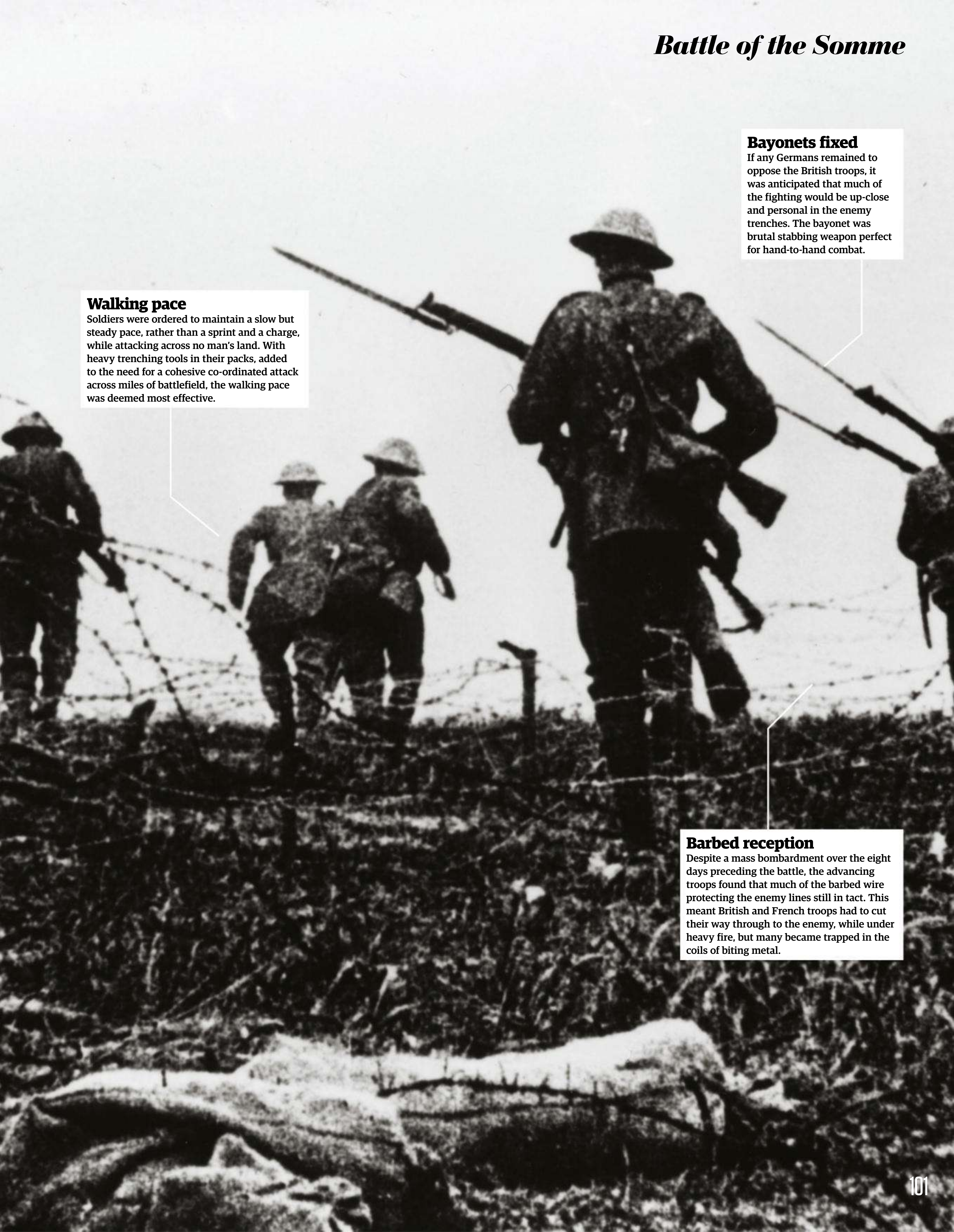
Haig devised his plans for the attack alongside General Sir Henry Rawlinson, who commanded the Fourth Army, which would form the bulk of the attack. Both men knew that the German defences would be well built up, so the miles of barbed wire, trench networks and bunker defences would be dealt with during an eight-day-long bombardment. It was thought this would be enough to cut the impassable wire, destroy the trench defences and crucially demoralise, if not completely obliterate, the German troops.

However, the German general Erich von Falkenhayn had made his order clear: not one foot of ground should be lost. This coupled with the substantial underground fortifications prepared over the preceding two years, using the chalky earth of the Somme region to burrow natural bunkers into the ground, meant the Germans were more than ready for the British. In fact, despite over a million shells rained down across no man's land for eight days, many of them failed to even detonate.

When British and French troops ventured out towards the German lines on around 7.30am on 1 July, not only were the Germans waiting for them with machine guns ready, but miles and miles of wire still sat stuck in the mud in front of them. What was intended as a swift breakthrough and a swift victory quickly turned into a battle of attrition. Over 20,000 British were killed on the first day, with many more wounded.

Over the following four months the men of the British and German Empires slogged it out doggedly. Every slight British gain was paid for with the lives of thousands, while even the first introduction of tanks to the battlefield in September was not enough to secure a firm and resounding victory. By mid-November the last gasp of the British offensive resulted in the taking of Beaumont Hamel towards the left-wing of the line – it had been one of Haig's first-day objectives.

With over 1,000,000 casualties from all sides, the Somme was a truly horrific loss to both sides, with only minimal successes. The objective of drawing German forces from the attack at Verdun had been achieved, but the essential and decisive breakthrough demanded by Haig had been a total failure. With December approaching, both sides were left with the winter to count their losses and dwell on one of the bloodiest and traumatic campaigns ever seen.



Bayonets fixed
If any Germans remained to oppose the British troops, it was anticipated that much of the fighting would be up-close and personal in the enemy trenches. The bayonet was brutal stabbing weapon perfect for hand-to-hand combat.

Walking pace
Soldiers were ordered to maintain a slow but steady pace, rather than a sprint and a charge, while attacking across no man's land. With heavy trenching tools in their packs, added to the need for a cohesive co-ordinated attack across miles of battlefield, the walking pace was deemed most effective.

Barbed reception
Despite a mass bombardment over the eight days preceding the battle, the advancing troops found that much of the barbed wire protecting the enemy lines still in tact. This meant British and French troops had to cut their way through to the enemy, while under heavy fire, but many became trapped in the coils of biting metal.

British Empire

TROOPS FOURTH ARMY, C.300,000

ARTILLERY C.1,800

TANKS C.22 (WORKING)

DOUGLAS HAIG

LEADER

The dogged field marshal had a plan for the Somme, and was determined to see it through.

Strengths His incorporation of new technology, as well as his formidable experience.

Weakness Persistence with clearly failing tactics, resulting in huge casualties.

MARK I TANK

KEY UNIT

These 'land ships' were a new a terrifying weapon on the battlefield.

Strengths Armour was impenetrable to normal gunfire, good for allied morale.

Weakness Slow, unreliable and impossible to manoeuvre flexibly.

18-POUND ARTILLERY

KEY WEAPON

The workhorse of the British bombardment.

Strengths Very good range and precise accuracy.

Weakness Many of the shells fired did not detonate.

01 Heavy bombardment

In order to cut the barbed wire around the defences, as well as destroy trenches and crush German morale, British and French artillery pummelled the enemy lines for eight days leading up to the day of the main offensive. Over 1,800 howitzers, field guns, trench mortars and heavy guns take part in this huge bombardment, however, unknown to the generals, much of the enemy wire remains intact and the Germans have withdrawn to wait underground for the bombing to cease.

02 Hawthorn Redoubt detonates

At around 7.30am on 1 July, the main attack is begun with a series of mine detonations beneath the German lines. The largest of these is under the Hawthorn Redoubt, a German fortification, which is triggered ten minutes earlier than the rest. The 18 tonnes of explosive creates a crater 30 metres deep.

03 The advance begins

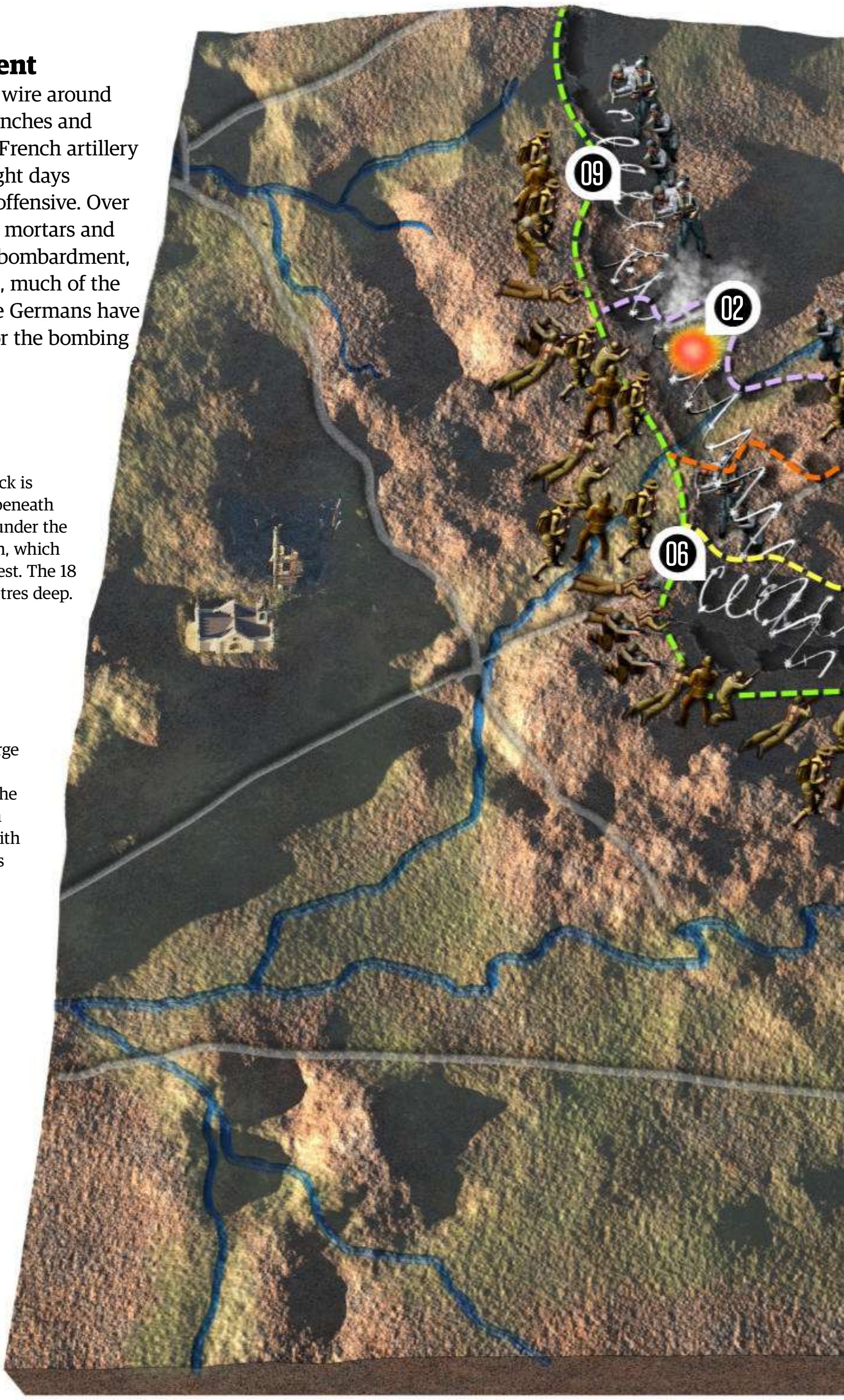
The British troops advance out of the trenches, carrying with them their rifles, boards to cross the German trenches, and heavy trenching tools. The Germans emerge from their bunkers and open up their machine guns on the advancing troops. The British attack is stalled, while to the south the French advance is more successful. With their bombardment beginning mere hours before the attack, the Germans are less prepared for the French sector's attack.

04 Tragic slaughter

The British army suffers 58,000 casualties during the first day of the battle, for the most part cut down by the well-prepared German machine guns. Few gains are made on this day, but the French 6th Army manages to take some of its first objectives, having been more successful in its opening advance.

05 GERMAN TRENCHES TAKEN

The first line of enemy trenches are taken by General Rawlinson's Fourth Army on 11 July, however German reinforcements are soon on their way from the nearby Verdun front.

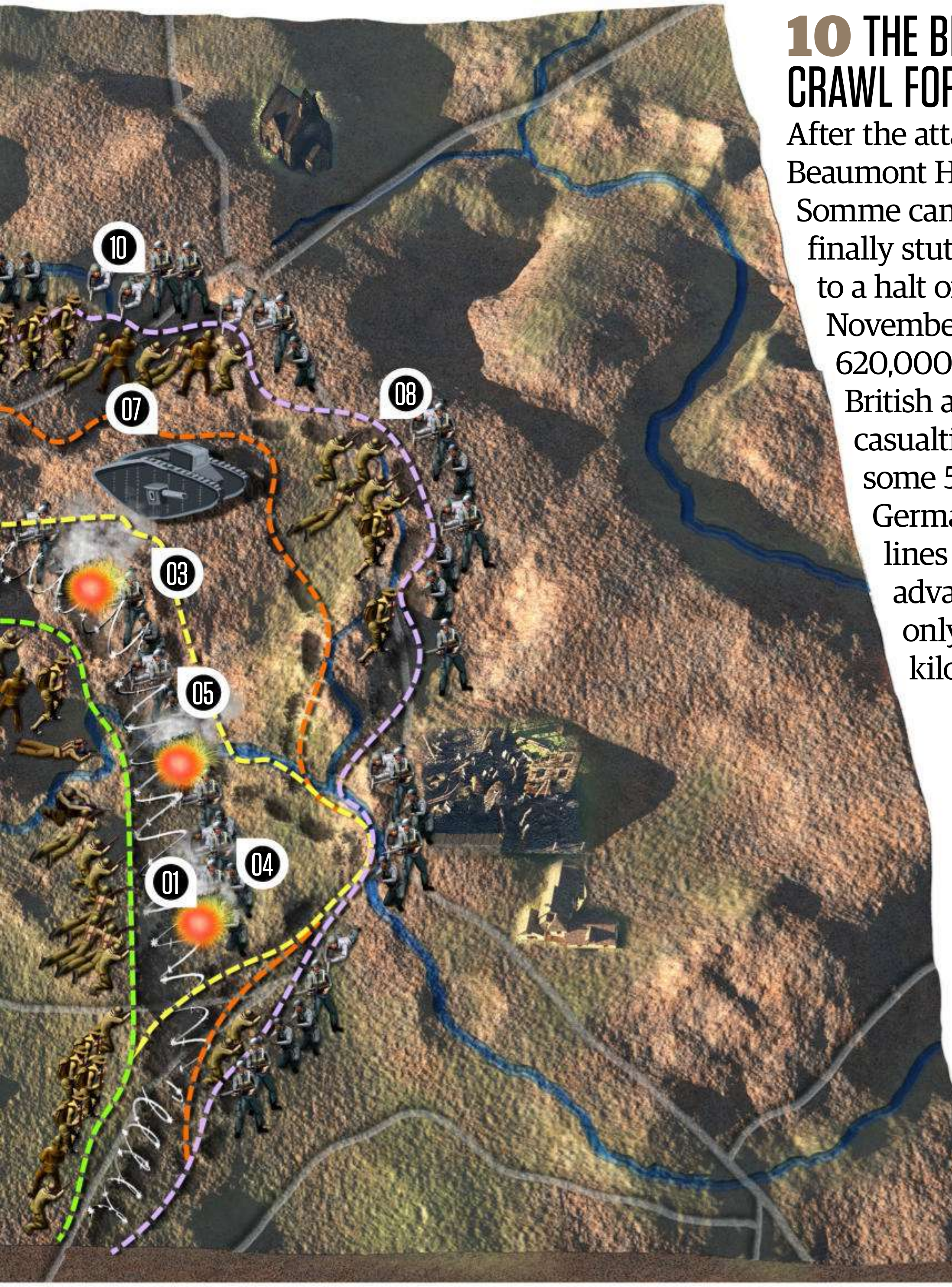


06 Slow progress

Commander Max von Gallwitz is put in command of the German frontline defences on the 19 July and the re-organised German army is able to hamper and British gains with counterattacks. Pozieres is taken by two Australian divisions on 23 July and by the end of the month the line has advanced, but few of the primary objectives have yet been taken.

07 Tank offensive

Tanks are used for the first time in the Great War, during an attack on German lines spanning 12km on 15 September, at Flers-Courcelette. Only around 50 'land battleships' are available and, several break down before even reaching the front line, leaving just 22 to rumble towards the German positions during this fresh push.



10 THE BRITISH CRAWL FORWARD

After the attack at Beaumont Hamel, the Somme campaign finally stutters to a halt on 18 November. With 620,000 estimated British and French casualties, and some 500,000 German, the lines have advanced only some 12 kilometres.

08 THE BRITISH CRAWL FORWARD

Over the next month attacks at Morval, Thiepval Ridge, Ancre Heights and others achieve small gains into October, paying for each trench and each advance with heavy casualties on both sides. The French likewise advance their lines in the south.

09 Final attack

With winter fast approaching, which would spell the end of any effective attacks, the last offensive effort of the Somme campaign sees the British advance on Beaumont Hamel, near the Ancre river. Beginning with artillery bombardments, the British Fifth Army attacked on 13 November. In some areas the attack was a great success, with many German prisoners taken, but the poor conditions soon took their toll on the British, and the attack was halted only with some of the initial objectives taken.

German Empire

TROOPS 9 DIVISIONS, TOTALLING C.90,000

GENERAL ERICH VON FALKENHAYN

LEADER

A seasoned soldier and politician with a mind for defence.

Strengths His preparations in building solid defences at the Somme battlefield.

Weakness A determination to not concede any ground resulted in heavy German losses.

MACHINE GUN TEAMS

KEY UNIT

Sending a deadly hail of bullets across the battlefield in very quick succession.

Strengths Devastating to the opposing infantry.

Weakness Hard to redeploy, would overheat with use.

GEWEHR 98 CARBINE

KEY WEAPON

The staple weapon of the German army, ideal for trench warfare of the World War.

Strengths A five-round clip and accurate up to 2,000 metres.

Weakness Long build of the barrel was unsuitable for close-quarters shooting.

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BATTLE OF CAMBRAI

CAMBRAI, NORTHERN FRANCE NOVEMBER 1917

By 1917 the British Army's notions of war had changed entirely. Any romantic ideals of the glory of combat and the open battlefield had been trampled and drowned in the blood-drenched, rain-slicked mud and barbed wire of the trenches of the Somme. Men fought and died for yards that felt like inches. Three years of almost imperceptible movement in the fields of France had pulled the wool from British commanders' eyes.

With change so desperately needed, it's not surprising that the plan of attack at Cambrai was the product of ideas from three groups. British preliminary bombardment meant German forces were always alerted to the fact an attack was imminent, enabling a tactical retreat before a counter-attack. In August 1917, artillery commander Brigadier General Henry Hugh Tudor proposed 'silent registration' of guns, bringing the artillery to the battlefield without alerting the enemy. This process would be greatly assisted by the use of the No.106 instantaneous fuses, which meant that shells would detonate immediately on impact.

Meanwhile, the Tank Corps' Brigadier General Hugh Elles and Lieutenant Colonel John Fuller were desperate for a chance to show their machines' worth. Fuller was convinced they would be capable of conducting lightning raids to smash resistance and drive the British line forward. This dovetailed neatly with Tudor's plan, as General Julian Byng, head of the Third Army, recognised. Byng turned his eye to Cambrai, a quiet area that was used by the Germans as supply point. While it was very well defended with the deep trenches of the Hindenburg Line and barbed wire, an attack would certainly be unexpected despite the area's strategic value.

With six infantry divisions, five cavalry divisions and nine tank battalions, more than 1,000 guns were mustered for the attack. There would be a front of around 10,000 yards, covered by the III and IV Corps of the Third Army, which would be widened as the attack progressed. The III Corps had to break the Masnières-Beaurevoir line, enabling the cavalry to circle around Cambrai and cut it off from reinforcements before 48 hours had passed. Obviously, secrecy was paramount.

The Mark IV tanks were divided into "male" and "female" groups, with the former having four Lewis guns and two six-pounder Hotchkiss naval guns. The latter were each fitted with six Lewis guns. Without the naval guns, the "female" tanks were lighter, at 26 tons, while the "males" weighed 28.

British soldiers photographed during the battle. The photo's original caption reads: "Down in a shell crater, we fought like Kilkenny cats"

Field Marshal Douglas Haig was the most senior British commander during WWI

General Julian Byng, commander of the British Third Army, pictured in April 1917

The crews also noticed that while the males had a door at the back, the female tanks had doors closer to the ground that were harder to get out of in an emergency. Eight men shared the single space with the engine, while the machine was only capable of reaching a speed of 3.7mph, and more typically around 1mph over bad terrain.

The tanks would lead, providing cover for the infantry as they crushed the barbed wire effortlessly under their tracks. As for navigating the trenches, each tank carried a fascine - a bundle of wood and branches, which would be deposited into the trench in order to fill it, so that the vehicle could drive over it. Meanwhile, a grapnel was fitted to some of the tanks to enable them to drag away the crumpled wire as they went, so that the path was clear for the advancing cavalry.

Several things needed to go very right in order for this so-called "clockwork" battle to work. Haig had fallen victim to overreaching in previous campaigns and he was determined that the Cambrai offensive have limited objectives and stick to its time frame. Minimising losses was crucial - even more so when he was forced to send two divisions to support the Italian front. Co-operation and communication between the divisions was also vital, as the battle's events would prove.

The battle rumbles to life

The attack began at 6.20am on 20 November as the artillery began shelling. With this stunning overture, the tanks advanced into the fog. The gentle incline made things very easy for the drivers, while the infantry marvelled at the ease with which the tanks rolled over the hazardous barbed wire as they followed them into battle, as did the men inside.

The initial advance seemed to be going impossibly well. The "clockwork battle" was living up to its name as the Germans were taken completely by surprise by this sudden, shocking attack. The British artillery kept up a devastating rate of fire, as much as possible given the two-rounds-per-minute rule to avoid overheating. The advance was also supported by the Royal Flying Corps, whose targets were on the ground rather than in the air. As the pilots braved machine-gun fire to drop their payloads, the weather worked against them. An Australian squadron pushed through punishingly thick fog at Havrincourt, barely able to see one another, let alone their targets. If their planes went down, they had to fight their way back to their lines, as Lieutenant Harry Taylor was forced to do, picking up the weapon of a fallen man and setting out to find support.

This isn't to say there was no resistance. A myth sprung up as the days went on about a German gunner who held the enemy at bay entirely by himself. That myth does a disservice to the determination and skill of the men who suddenly found themselves on the back foot. Some of the troops stationed near Cambrai had come from the Russian front and had never seen a tank before. It's impossible to know what these soldiers thought as the metal leviathans rolled towards them, but they fell back on their training, resisting where possible before making a tactical retreat.

Before long, communication began to prove an issue. When the tanks worked in tandem with the infantry, such as through Havrincourt and Graincourt, things went very smoothly. Elsewhere,

"With six infantry divisions, five cavalry divisions and nine tank battalions, more than 1,000 guns were mustered for the attack"

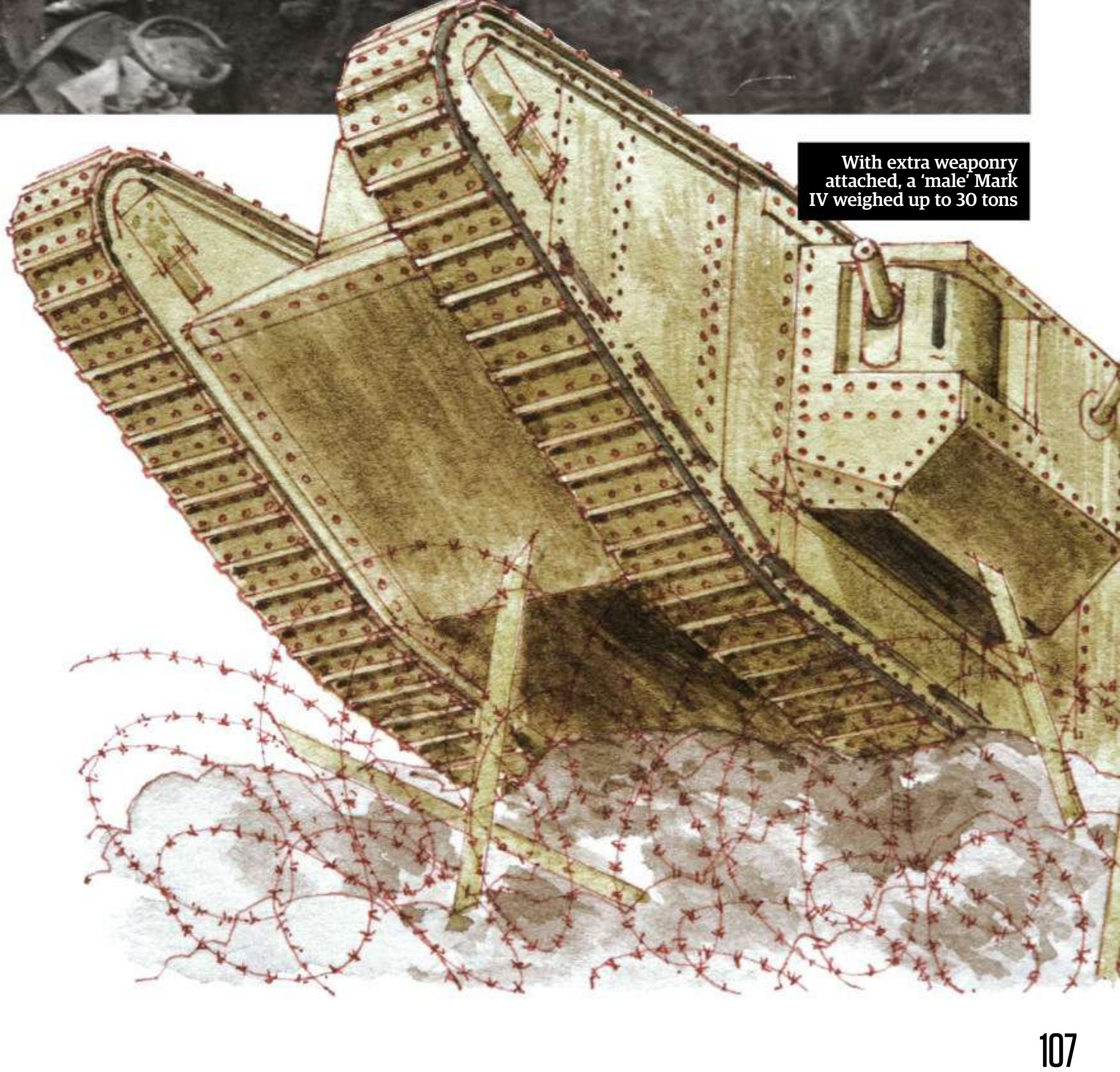
Men from the 11th Leicester Regiment in a captured enemy trench at Ribecourt

infantrymen were forced to bang on the door of the tanks to get their attention, while confusion over objectives led to groups of infantry being forced to take key positions without artillery support. However, sitting in these slow-moving targets had its own terrors. They drew the bulk of enemy fire and if the engine gave out, whether due to attack, or even a fire, the tank became a sitting duck. Once engaged in combat, the inside of the tank would become incredibly hot as the guns began to fire and the sound of their doing so was deafening. Visibility was shockingly poor, while the fact that most tanks had to stop in order to turn meant that they were a popular target on the battlefield.

Nevertheless, the speed with which they were taking ground was intoxicating; each trench taken and each line of wire cleared was another step towards the objective and morale had rarely been higher. As the tanks moved further away from their lines of reinforcement, establishing a clear road and lines of communication back became crucial. However, the supply mules proved nearly useless in the tangle of mud and wire, while the narrow roads quickly became clogged with traffic back and forth, ferrying wounded and prisoners.

The Third Army consolidates

Despite the ground gained, the first day ended with some major concerns. While crossing trenches



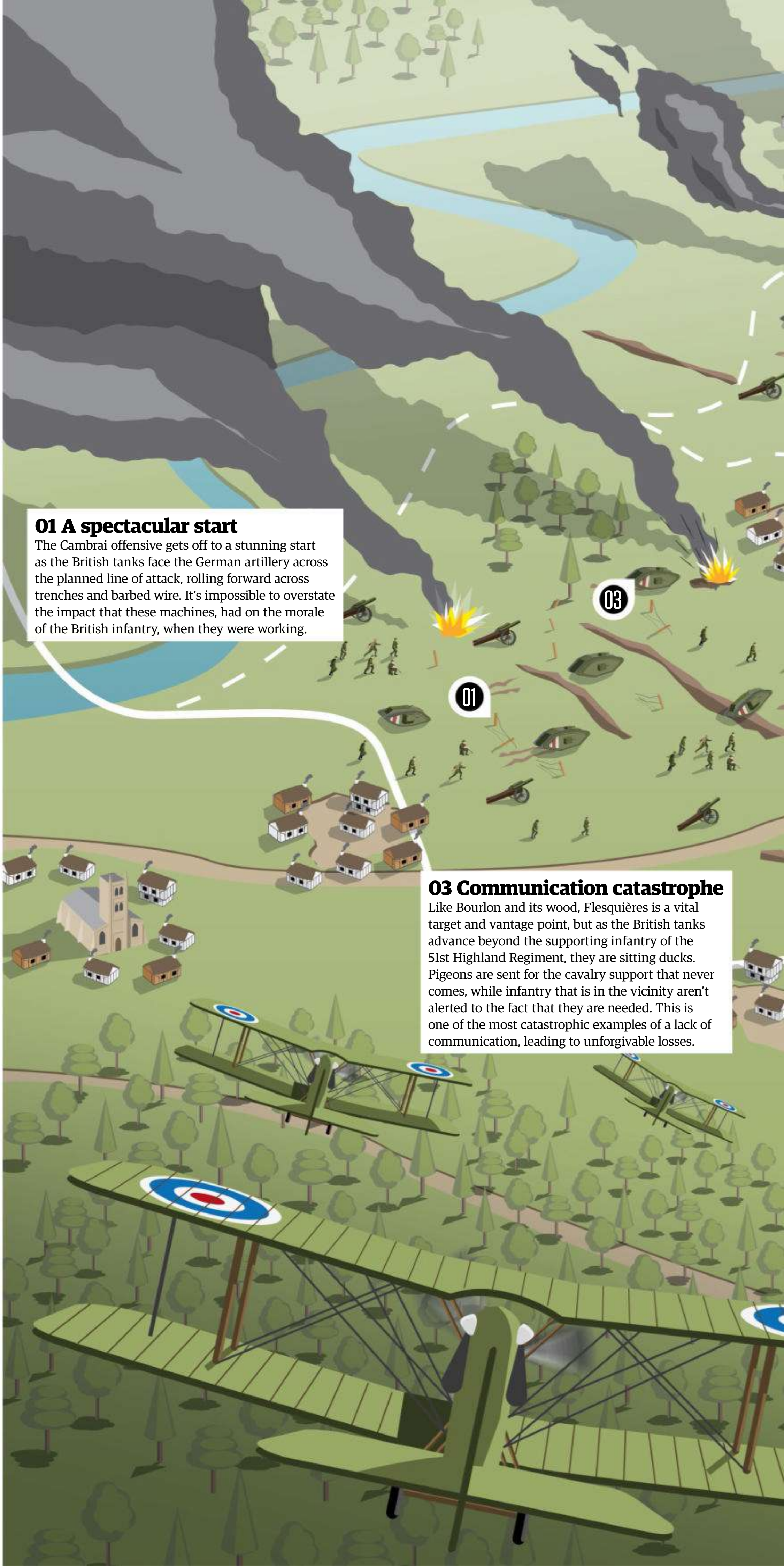
With extra weaponry attached, a 'male' Mark IV weighed up to 30 tons had proved easy enough for the tanks, moving past the St Quentin Canal was another matter indeed. A crucial bridge at Masnières had been crushed by a tank that had attempted to cross the canal, stopping the planned infantry advance, while another had been mined. The cavalry was delayed by the clogged roads, while a lack of communication frequently meant they were stranded or forced to retreat. A lone squadron of Canadian cavalry realised it was the only unit to make it across the canal at Masnières and was forced to find its way back around and across.

Meanwhile, the key village of Flesquières had not been captured after the advancing tank divisions became separated from the infantry of the 51st (Highland) Division. With no infantry support, the tanks were target practice for the gunners at Flesquières ridge and suffered huge losses. Messengers from the battlefield, some of whom walked the two miles on foot, struggled to convince their commanders that Flesquières had not yet been captured. Crucially, Major General George Montague Harper refused to commit any of the troops held in reserve to take the objective.

The second day required consolidation and advancement. Masnières was taken in the morning, but as a salient it was open to a punishing amount of shell and machine-gun fire, and the German air force soon reappeared to make life very difficult for the British troops. Meanwhile, the tanks had used all their improvised wooden fascine bridges on the first day, which made crossing the trenches difficult, and the infantry were reluctant to advance without them.

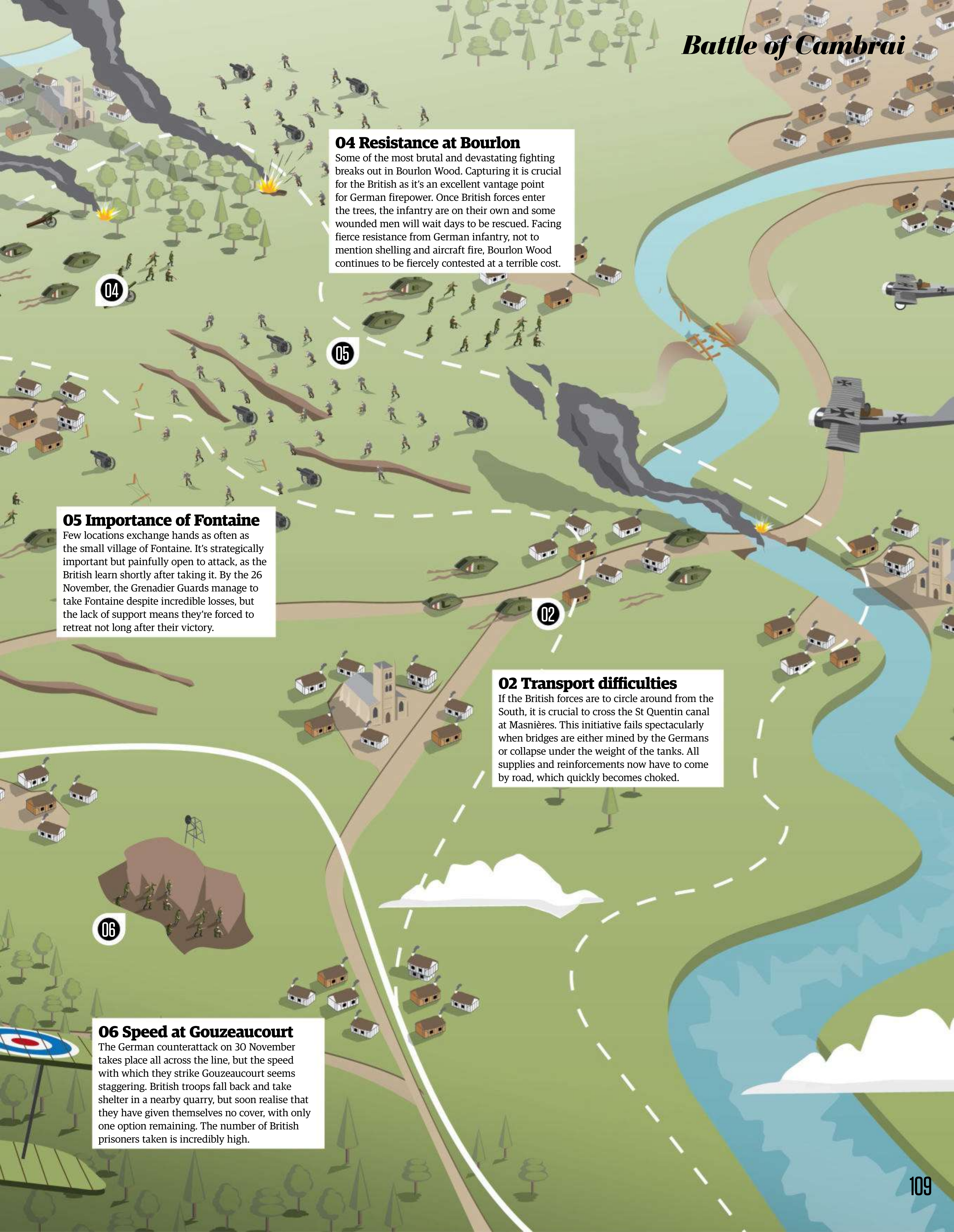
Things looked much better for the IV Corps, which advanced on Flesquières dreading the prospect of a prepared German resistance, only to find it had been abandoned. In contrast, while the cavalry helped take Cantaing, it struggled to work in tandem with the tanks as planned. Similarly, as the tanks moved into villages, it became clear they were not prepared for street fighting. With no

British	German
INFANTRY 6 CORPS	INFANTRY 1 CORPS
LOSSES C.44,000	LOSSES C.46,000
LEADERS FIELD MARSHAL DOUGLAS HAIG, GENERAL JULIAN BYNG	LEADERS GENERAL GEORG VONDER MARWITZ, RUPPRECHT OF BAVARIA
GAME CHANGERS 378 fighting tanks that enabled the British to move forward at an incredible rate on the first day of fighting	GAME CHANGERS The air force led by Baron Von Richtofen that arrived on the 23 November to combat the RFC.



01 A spectacular start
The Cambrai offensive gets off to a stunning start as the British tanks face the German artillery across the planned line of attack, rolling forward across trenches and barbed wire. It's impossible to overstate the impact that these machines, had on the morale of the British infantry, when they were working.

03 Communication catastrophe
Like Bourlon and its wood, Flesquières is a vital target and vantage point, but as the British tanks advance beyond the supporting infantry of the 51st Highland Regiment, they are sitting ducks. Pigeons are sent for the cavalry support that never comes, while infantry that is in the vicinity aren't alerted to the fact that they are needed. This is one of the most catastrophic examples of a lack of communication, leading to unforgivable losses.



04 Resistance at Bourlon

Some of the most brutal and devastating fighting breaks out in Bourlon Wood. Capturing it is crucial for the British as it's an excellent vantage point for German firepower. Once British forces enter the trees, the infantry are on their own and some wounded men will wait days to be rescued. Facing fierce resistance from German infantry, not to mention shelling and aircraft fire, Bourlon Wood continues to be fiercely contested at a terrible cost.

05 Importance of Fontaine

Few locations exchange hands as often as the small village of Fontaine. It's strategically important but painfully open to attack, as the British learn shortly after taking it. By the 26 November, the Grenadier Guards manage to take Fontaine despite incredible losses, but the lack of support means they're forced to retreat not long after their victory.

02 Transport difficulties

If the British forces are to circle around from the South, it is crucial to cross the St Quentin canal at Masnières. This initiative fails spectacularly when bridges are either mined by the Germans or collapse under the weight of the tanks. All supplies and reinforcements now have to come by road, which quickly becomes choked.

06 Speed at Gouzeaucourt

The German counterattack on 30 November takes place all across the line, but the speed with which they strike Gouzeaucourt seems staggering. British troops fall back and take shelter in a nearby quarry, but soon realise that they have given themselves no cover, with only one option remaining. The number of British prisoners taken is incredibly high.

machine gun on the top of the tank (it would be introduced in 1918), they were horribly vulnerable to fire from second-storey windows. Still, Fontaine was secured despite heavy losses, leaving Bourlon and its dense wood as the next target.

The offensive was on a knife edge without enough men to consolidate these gains. Fontaine was incredibly vulnerable, but was refused any artillery support and destroyed bridges made moving supplies incredibly difficult. Meanwhile, the German vantage points of Bourlon and Bourlon Wood posed a serious threat to the British. After a last-ditch effort ordered by Byng to push through, the order came to halt and dig in.

When Haig learned of the attack's successes and failures, he decided to junk the 48-hour time limit and continue the advance. He toured the battlefield, congratulating the men and helping to spread the myth of the lone German gunner at the Flesquières ridge, as that was surely a better explanation for the number of ruined British machines on the battlefield than the alternative. During this apparent lull on 22 November, German forces rushed Fontaine and retook it. Resistance was growing, and as the British dug in for the night in the miserable November cold they knew that their momentum was dripping away. Haig stressed to Byng that Bourlon and Fontaine must be captured by the end of 23 November.

"Running from tree to tree, with the noise of ceaseless gun fire, a huge number of soldiers were lost"

Bitter fighting at Bourlon Wood

The fresh offensive was major, with 400 guns and 92 tanks, while the 40th Bantam Division was dispatched in order to relieve some of the exhausted men at the front. The tanks met with fierce resistance in Fontaine, and were forced to withdraw to the disapproval of Tanks Corps intelligence officer Captain Elliot Hotblack, who saw the devastating effect their retreat had on the infantry's morale. Further down the line, German infantry made life hell for the tanks, finding the machine gunners' blind spots and throwing hand grenades inside, leaving the British soldiers trapped and burning.

Having reached Bourlon Wood with the help of the tanks, fighting through the thick wood was now the infantry's job alone. It was here that some of the most-intense and gruesome combat was seen. Running from tree to tree, with an unimaginable noise of ceaseless gun and artillery fire, a huge number of British soldiers were lost in Bourlon Wood.

When the German forces were finally pushed out, they started shelling it. Meanwhile, both Bourlon and Fontaine remained in German hands despite attempts in the afternoon, but the casualties on both sides were horrific. As night fell, troops were sent to support the men in Bourlon Wood as counter attacks from the Germans continued well into the night. Haig told Byng that Bourlon ridge simply must be taken, so the Guard division was summoned to support and relieve the depleted forces.

German officers pose with a captured British tank in Cambrai. Hundreds of stranded or abandoned British machines were captured during the offensive

Tommies look on as British artillery arrives at Cambrai in December, 1917

Manfred von Richtofen, known as 'The Red Baron', played a pivotal role from the air at Cambrai

Throughout 24 November, shelling and counterattacks continued on Bourlon Wood. Poor weather made it difficult for any RFC pilots to take to the skies and challenge the forces of the recently arrived Manfred von Richthofen, the Red Baron, whose planes rained fire on the wood. German efforts to grind down the soldiers in the wood continued throughout the day. Counterattack met counterattack, and 25 November saw further terrible lapses in communication and bloody skirmishes. Battalions without tank support were mown down by machine-gun fire at Bourlon, while an entire cavalry regiment ordered to wait within sight of the German artillery was shelled. A furious Haig ordered the capture of Bourlon and Fontaine by the 27 November, as German forces continued to push at the exhausted British throughout the night.

A planned attack on 26 November was the cause of fierce argument between Major General Braithwaite, who bemoaned the lack of support and fresh troops, and Byng, who had his instructions from Haig. The attack went ahead, as Fontaine was taken at tremendous cost and targets in Bourlon Wood were reached. However, there was no time before counterattacks drove the British forces back.

The German offensive

While skirmishes wore both sides down, the time had come for the major German counter-offensive after reinforcements had been arriving since the second day of the attack.

Planned by Crown Prince Rupprecht of Bavaria, and widened by his superior General Erich Ludendorff, it was the first offensive planned against the British since 1915. Gas was fired into the wood two days before the attack, and at 6am on 30 November the assault began. Despite the warnings of some key officers, the British troops were simply not prepared for the assault at Gouzeaucourt, as German soldiers swarmed the British line and amassed prisoners. This was the first instance of the German stormtroop tactics, as the first wave of soldiers went around targets and cut them off as the further troops arrived.

As British soldiers realised what was happening, across all their lines, attempts were made to regroup and stand their ground as startled officers threw down their shaving kits and looked for their weapons. While German forces broke through in some places and were held up in others, communication broke down once again. There was simply no plan in place for this kind of counterattack, meaning that any attempts to fight back and reclaim ground were made on the hoof.

Much as the Germans had offered fierce resistance, so too now did the British. At Les Rues Vertes, the inspired and determined defensive tactics of Captain Robert Gee meant that their position and the brigade's ammunition dumps were held. He set up a Lewis gun, organised bombing raids against the attackers, killed two Germans who had infiltrated his position and killed the guards, before charging a German machine-gun post with his two pistols. While seeking medical attention he was forced to jump into a canal and swim to safety. His actions earned him the Victoria Cross.

As reinforcements arrived, the Guards Brigade retook Gouzeaucourt, while the forces in Bourlon Wood held determinedly to their positions. The conflict turned into a series of costly but unproductive skirmishes. As the days passed and the casualties mounted, Haig finally realised the necessity to fall back and form a line for the winter. He ordered a retreat on 3 December and by 7 December the lines had settled down, with both sides having made both considerable gains and significant losses in territory.

The British casualties numbered 44,207 killed, wounded or missing. The number of German losses has proved harder to calculate, with estimates ranging between 41,000 and 53,300. The battle has proven to be one of the most fertile grounds from which myths surrounding the First World War to develop. But speculation and stories aside, what is clear is that crucial lessons were learned in how important communication and co-operation between different divisions was.

A lack of support in reserve, a lack of communication, and that terrible desire to overreach led to the attack's ultimate failure. While it may have been the first large-scale tank offensive in the Great War, this landmark came at a terrible cost to both sides.

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OPERATION

EASTERN AND NORTHERN EUROPE,

When World War II's totalitarian titans clashed, Eastern Europe turned red with blood and the Soviet Union was brought to the brink of collapse

LER
SUS
ALIN

BARBAROSSA

22 JUNE – 5 DECEMBER 1941

A war of total annihilation was about to begin. The target of the Nazi wrath was the Soviet Union, the communist powerhouse that dominated from the Baltic Sea to the North Pacific. Since penning *Mein Kampf* in 1925, German dictator Adolf Hitler had made it his mission to supply the German people with the Lebensraum - living space - he believed they needed and end what he saw as the creeping evil of Bolshevism, the revolutionary creed that, as he saw it, threatened the fragile German republic of the 1920s. This wasn't just any military campaign - it was a clash between two mutually exclusive ideologies that viewed each other with absolute contempt, two totalitarian dictatorships that ruled through fear and demanded absolute, unthinking obedience, and two all-powerful monsters that commanded their war effort from the highest level. In the spring of 1941, Austrian failed artist Adolf Hitler would break his pact with Georgian bank robber Josef Stalin - and millions would pay for their arrogance.

Deutschlands Sieg
EUROPAS FREIHEIT

Walther von Brauchitsch and Adolf Hitler oversee the victory parade of the Wehrmacht in Poland 1939

FROM THE BALTIC TO THE BLACK SEA

Contrary to popular myth, there was no single 'Blitzkrieg' doctrine in the German army – their successes of 1939 and 1940 were built on a mobile warfare doctrine developed after World War I, coupled with a strong professional officer corps and air superiority. By December 1940, though, Hitler had been seduced by his own propaganda. Convinced the USSR would crumble in the face of a knock-out blow, Führer Directive 21 outlined the plan of what was to become Operation Barbarossa – named for the Holy Roman Emperor who led the Third Crusade.

134 full-strength divisions were committed to the new front under Field Marshal Walther von Brauschitsch, spread over the continent from Memel in the north to Odessa in the south. The 1939 German-Soviet non-aggression pact that had carved up Eastern Europe for the two despots was torn up, and Hitler confidently predicted the invasion would take a mere ten weeks.

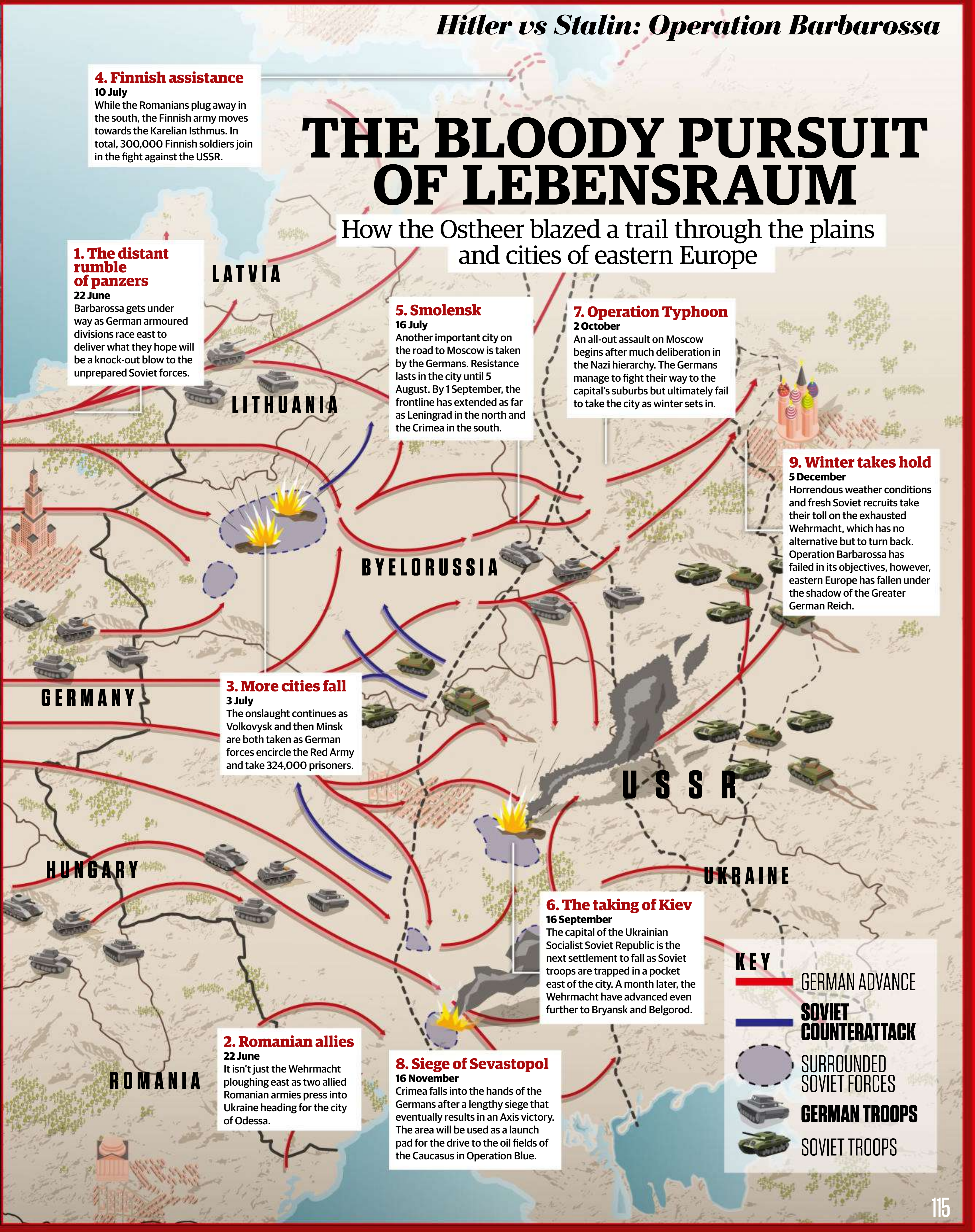
The tactical pre-emptive strike would be fought by the Ostheer on three fronts by Army Groups North, South and Centre, and aimed to expel all Soviet forces behind the Arkhangelsk-Astrakhan (A-A) Line and take Leningrad, Moscow and Kiev. Army Group Centre, led by WWI veteran Field Marshal Fedor von Bock, would take the same route as Napoleon's ill-fated invasion of Russia 129 years prior. To ensure the Germans didn't suffer the same fate, General Friedrich Paulus was entrusted with undertaking a strategic survey of the attack zone. Paulus advised encirclement tactics to prevent the Red Army retreating and overstretching German supply lines, locking them into a costly guerrilla war in the Soviet interior.

Barbarossa was delayed by over a month as German forces experienced stiffer opposition than expected in the Balkans. The Yugoslavs in particular put up fierce resistance and Hitler was forced to take over the Italian invasion of Greece. The delay could have given the Kremlin time to rally defences, but despite warnings, Stalin was convinced Hitler would not invade until Britain was firmly under German occupation. The Soviet leader was tipped off as early as December 1940, and was reminded of the threat in a message sent by Winston Churchill in April 1941. Stalin was given one final chance to mobilise his troops on 21 June 1941, the eve of Barbarossa. Wehrmacht Sergeant-Major Alfred Lishof, who had deserted his unit and been taken in by Soviet soldiers, claimed a German attack was imminent. Stalin rebuffed his warnings. He received a rude awakening the next day: the war for the east had begun.

> "WE ONLY HAVE TO KICK IN THE DOOR AND THE WHOLE ROTTEN STRUCTURE WILL COME CRASHING DOWN"
>
> HITLER'S PREDICTION FOR JUNE 1941

THE BLOODY PURSUIT OF LEBENSRAUM

How the Ostheer blazed a trail through the plains and cities of eastern Europe



1. The distant rumble of panzers

22 June

Barbarossa gets under way as German armoured divisions race east to deliver what they hope will be a knock-out blow to the unprepared Soviet forces.

2. Romanian allies

22 June

It isn't just the Wehrmacht ploughing east as two allied Romanian armies press into Ukraine heading for the city of Odessa.

3. More cities fall

3 July

The onslaught continues as Volkovysk and then Minsk are both taken as German forces encircle the Red Army and take 324,000 prisoners.

4. Finnish assistance

10 July

While the Romanians plug away in the south, the Finnish army moves towards the Karelian Isthmus. In total, 300,000 Finnish soldiers join in the fight against the USSR.

5. Smolensk

16 July

Another important city on the road to Moscow is taken by the Germans. Resistance lasts in the city until 5 August. By 1 September, the frontline has extended as far as Leningrad in the north and the Crimea in the south.

6. The taking of Kiev

16 September

The capital of the Ukrainian Socialist Soviet Republic is the next settlement to fall as Soviet troops are trapped in a pocket east of the city. A month later, the Wehrmacht have advanced even further to Bryansk and Belgorod.

7. Operation Typhoon

2 October

An all-out assault on Moscow begins after much deliberation in the Nazi hierarchy. The Germans manage to fight their way to the capital's suburbs but ultimately fail to take the city as winter sets in.

8. Siege of Sevastopol

16 November

Crimea falls into the hands of the Germans after a lengthy siege that eventually results in an Axis victory. The area will be used as a launch pad for the drive to the oil fields of the Caucasus in Operation Blue.

9. Winter takes hold

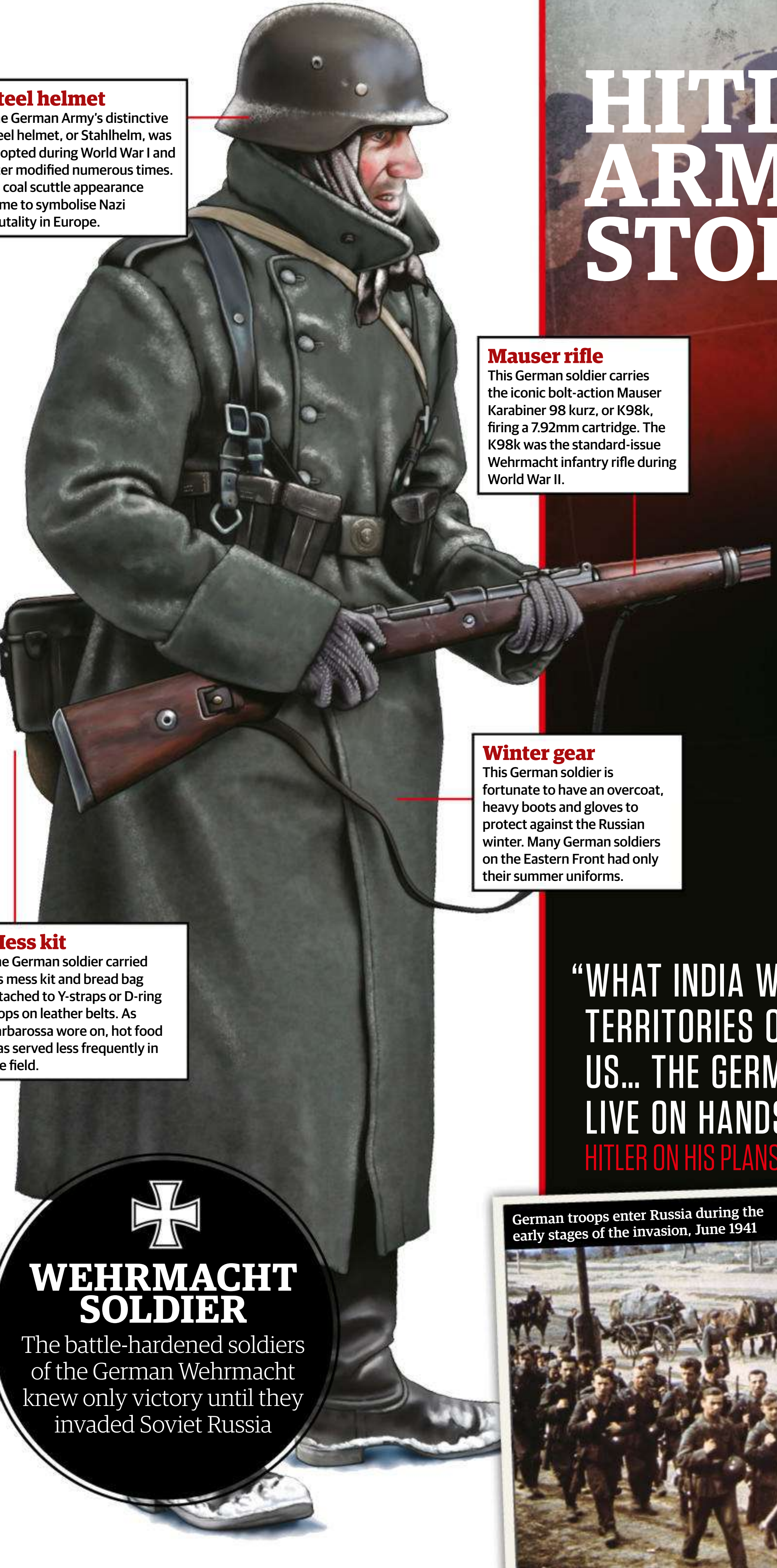
5 December

Horrendous weather conditions and fresh Soviet recruits take their toll on the exhausted Wehrmacht, which has no alternative but to turn back. Operation Barbarossa has failed in its objectives, however, eastern Europe has fallen under the shadow of the Greater German Reich.

HITLER'S ARMOURED STORM

The ill-prepared Red Army and the fury of the oncoming assault was a lethal cocktail for the USSR. Stalin's purges of generals had put his forces at a severe disadvantage and the troops were growing weary of constant supervision by the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD). The Soviets may have had up to three times the number of tanks and aircraft as the Third Reich but they were widely dispersed across the vast country, lacked strong command and suffered from obsolete technology. The first major engagement of the Baltic front was the Battle of Raseiniai beginning on 23 June. The attack included a huge bombardment from both ground artillery and the Luftwaffe, which crippled Soviet airfields, seeing the Soviet Air Forces lose 25 per cent of its strength. Mechanised divisions covered up to 80 kilometres a day as the front went further eastwards, while the infantry was behind them, yomping 30 kilometres a day. Encircling the shell-shocked Soviets was paying off as pincer movements accounted for hundreds of thousands of prisoners of war. In early July, Bialystok and Minsk also fell as the Red Army retreated from Belarus to the banks of the Dnieper River. The Wehrmacht exerted technical and tactical dominance, with 750 German armoured vehicles crushing 3,500 Soviet armoured vehicles at the Battle of Brody between 23-30 June.

> "WHAT INDIA WAS FOR ENGLAND THE TERRITORIES OF RUSSIA WILL BE FOR US… THE GERMAN COLONISTS OUGHT TO LIVE ON HANDSOME, SPACIOUS FARMS"
>
> HITLER ON HIS PLANS FOR THE LEBENSRAUM



Steel helmet
The German Army's distinctive steel helmet, or Stahlhelm, was adopted during World War I and later modified numerous times. Its coal scuttle appearance came to symbolise Nazi brutality in Europe.

Mauser rifle
This German soldier carries the iconic bolt-action Mauser Karabiner 98 kurz, or K98k, firing a 7.92mm cartridge. The K98k was the standard-issue Wehrmacht infantry rifle during World War II.

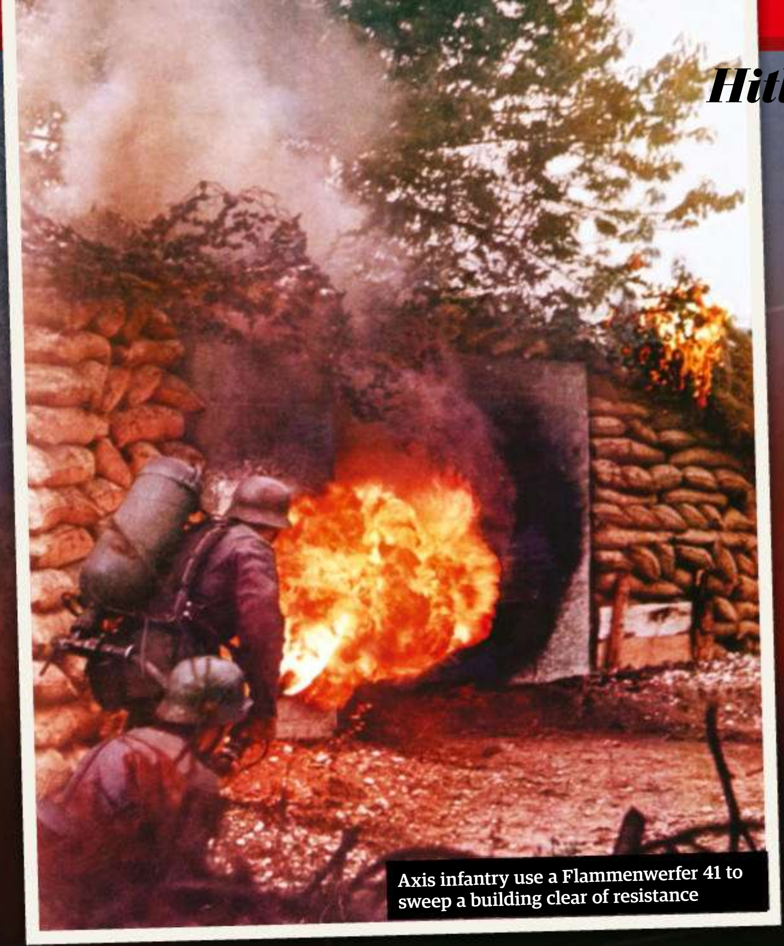
Winter gear
This German soldier is fortunate to have an overcoat, heavy boots and gloves to protect against the Russian winter. Many German soldiers on the Eastern Front had only their summer uniforms.

Mess kit
The German soldier carried his mess kit and bread bag attached to Y-straps or D-ring loops on leather belts. As Barbarossa wore on, hot food was served less frequently in the field.

WEHRMACHT SOLDIER

The battle-hardened soldiers of the German Wehrmacht knew only victory until they invaded Soviet Russia

German troops enter Russia during the early stages of the invasion, June 1941



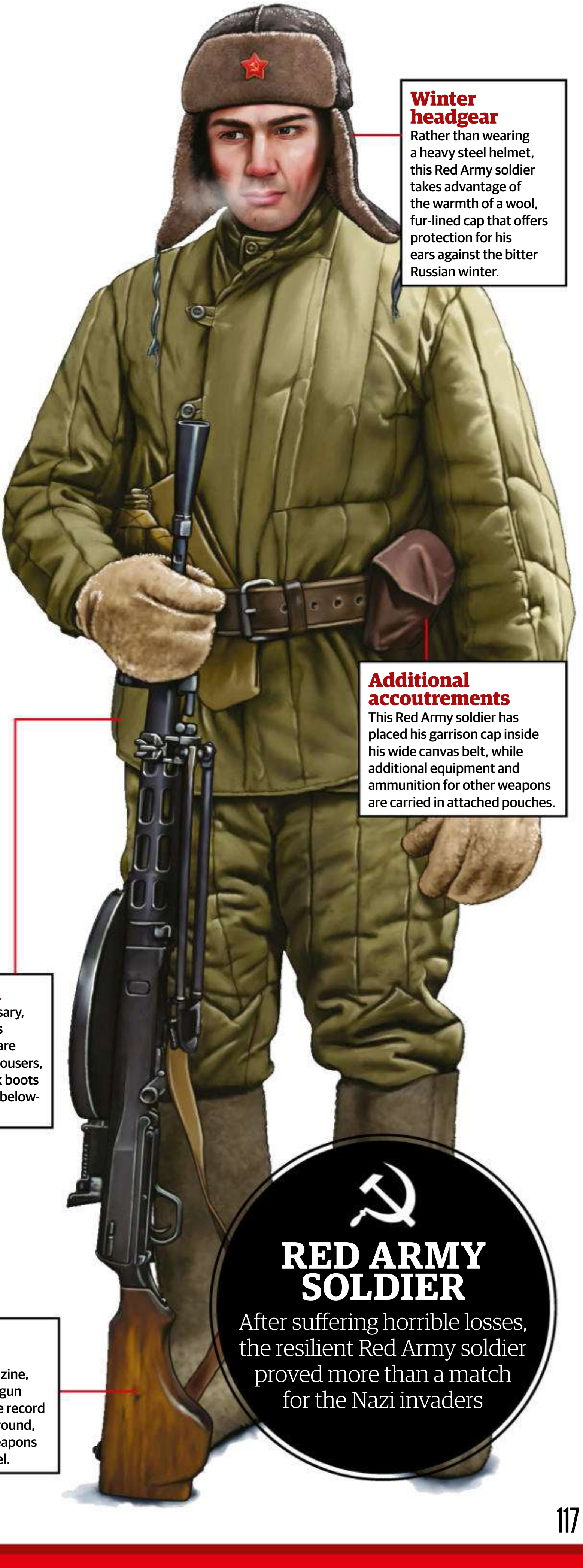
Axis infantry use a Flammenwerfer 41 to sweep a building clear of resistance

> “BURNING VILLAGES, STARING BODIES OF FALLEN RUSSIAN SOLDIERS, SWOLLEN CARCASSES OF DEAD HORSES, RUSTING, BLACKENED AND BURNT OUT TANKS WERE THE SIGNS OF THE MARCH”
>
> A GERMAN INFANTRYMAN DESCRIBES THE EARLY DAYS OF BARBAROSSA

July saw torrential rain drench the battlefields of eastern Europe. It was so severe that the free-roaming Ostheer had been stopped in its tracks and columns of troops tailed back tens of kilometres waiting for the sun to emerge from the clouds. This gave the beleaguered Red Army a chance to rediscover its composure. The reaction was a counterattack but the Wehrmacht stood firm, beating the Soviets back and advancing ever further towards Smolensk, which fell after a month of heavy fighting. The Germans were suffering substantial losses now but the Wehrmacht juggernaut just kept on coming. Stalin ordered a strict scorched-earth policy. All across the Eastern Front bridges were destroyed, railway lines were sabotaged and roads were demolished. Strong resistance was now a must as the Ostheer drew ever nearer to the cradle of Soviet power. Stalin didn't tolerate failure and General Dmitry Pavlov was duly executed for his failure to prevent the German advance. Now his commanders were much more hesitant to surrender or retreat. While Stalin was purging the Red Army from the top down, the Wehrmacht was busy pillaging the population of Minsk.

RED ARMY SOLDIER

After suffering horrible losses, the resilient Red Army soldier proved more than a match for the Nazi invaders



Winter headgear
Rather than wearing a heavy steel helmet, this Red Army soldier takes advantage of the warmth of a wool, fur-lined cap that offers protection for his ears against the bitter Russian winter.

Additional accoutrements
This Red Army soldier has placed his garrison cap inside his wide canvas belt, while additional equipment and ammunition for other weapons are carried in attached pouches.

Winter uniform
Unlike his German adversary, the Red Army soldier was outfitted for winter warfare with a quilted coat and trousers, fur-lined gloves and thick boots that provided warmth in below-freezing temperatures.

DP-28 light machine gun
With its large drum magazine, the DP-28 light machine gun earned the nickname ‘the record player’. Firing a 7.62mm round, it provided automatic weapons support at the squad level.

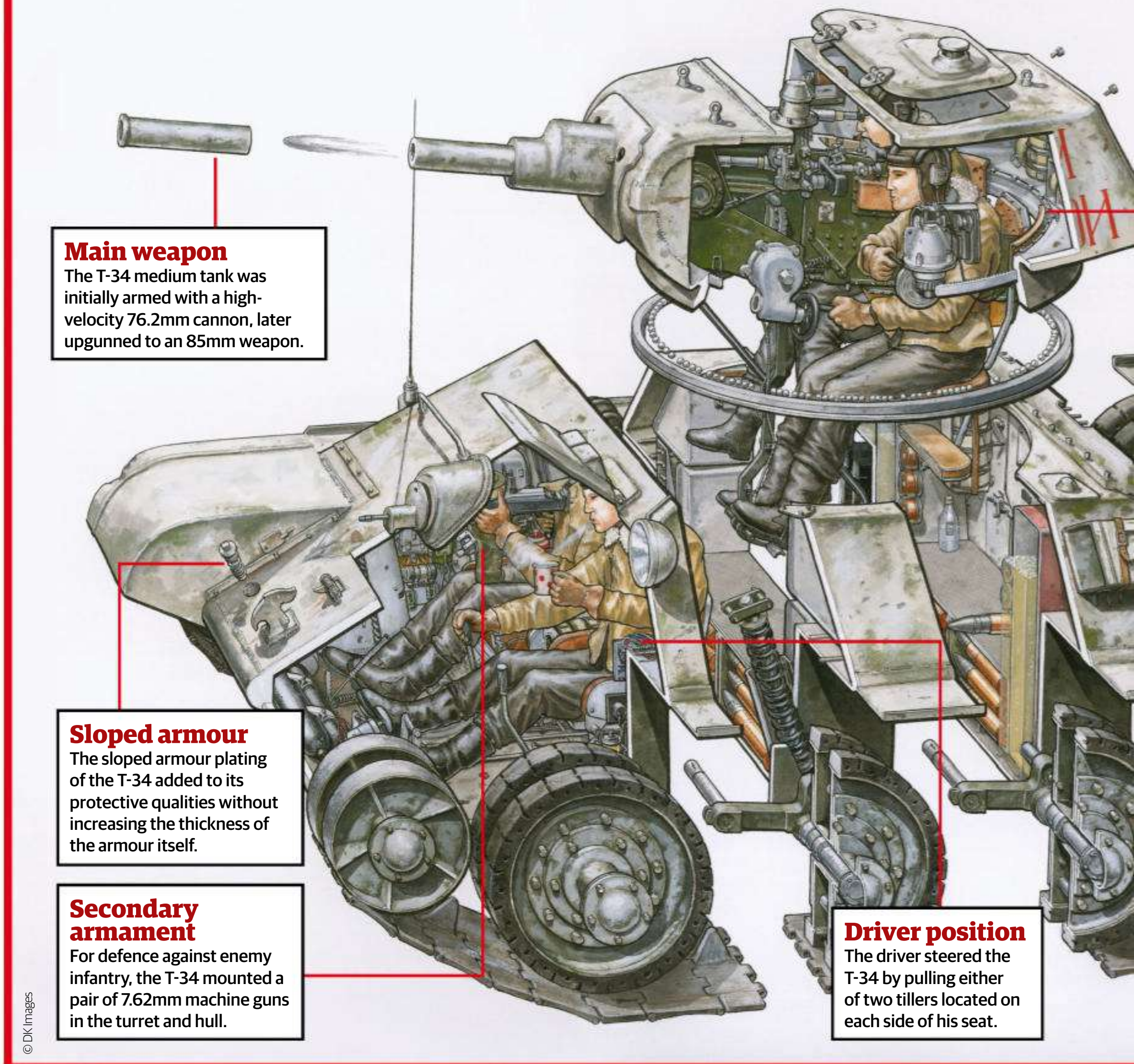
THE HOLOCAUST IN THE EAST

As the front kept expanding, Hitler's vision for an ethnically 'pure' Lebensraum was beginning to be realised behind the lines. Following in the infantry's tracks was the Einsatzgruppen – paramilitary death squads under the command of the SS. They systematically murdered Jews, communist officials and intelligentsia, and Romani and Sinti Gypsies in mass shootings, public hangings and gas trucks, which used the exhaust emissions from motors to choke their victims. Concentration camps and ghettos were also established, and their inmates used as slave labour.

Some of the Wehrmacht command had misgivings but this didn't stop it, and many regular army units, police units, locally raised auxiliaries and fascist militia were complicit in the bloodletting. One of the largest of the mass murders was at Babi Yar on the outskirts of Kiev in September 1941. SS records report a total of 600,000 killed in 1941 alone and the terror outlasted Barbarossa with up to 2 million people being killed by the Einsatzgruppen between 1941 and 1944.

After the close of hostilities, 24 former Einsatzgruppen commanders were charged with crimes against humanity at the Einsatzgruppen Trial, from 1947-48. 14 received death sentences and two received life sentences. The others were given lesser sentences. The ultimate architects of the system, Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler and SS-Obergruppenführer Reinhard Heydrich, both met a bloody end – the former committed suicide in his prison cell while the latter was assassinated in Prague by Allied agents.

> "PEOPLE ARE CRYING AND TALKING ABOUT THE NAZIS' HATRED OF JEWS AND COMMUNISTS… IS IT POSSIBLE THAT THE INVADERS NO LONGER REGARD US AS HUMAN BEINGS AND BRAND US JUST LIKE CATTLE? ONE CAN NOT ACCEPT SUCH MEANNESS. BUT WHO DARES OPPOSE THEM?"
>
> VILNA RESIDENT MACHA ROLNIKAS WRITING IN HER DIARY IN JUNE 1941



Main weapon
The T-34 medium tank was initially armed with a high-velocity 76.2mm cannon, later upgunned to an 85mm weapon.

Sloped armour
The sloped armour plating of the T-34 added to its protective qualities without increasing the thickness of the armour itself.

Secondary armament
For defence against enemy infantry, the T-34 mounted a pair of 7.62mm machine guns in the turret and hull.

Driver position
The driver steered the T-34 by pulling either of two tillers located on each side of his seat.

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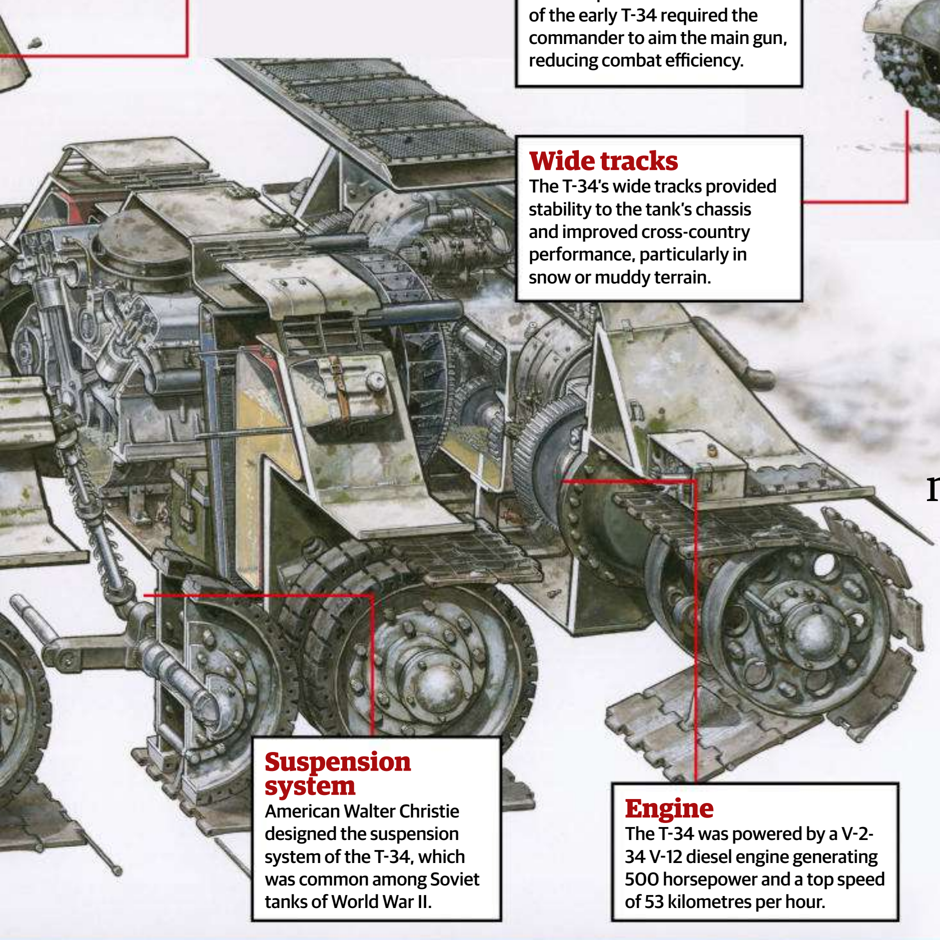
THE ADVANCE FALTERS

The first phase of Barbarossa was over and Hitler and his generals now had to make a judgement call. There were three possible routes that lay ahead: drive on to Moscow, venture north to conquer the birthplace of communism, Leningrad, or turn south and head for the USSR's breadbasket, Ukraine. Hitler, overruling his generals in the process, opted for the latter, reasoning that the oil fields of Baku and the Soviet industry hub at Kharkov were a priority. This would weaken the attacking thrust on Moscow, but the Führer, still completely convinced of his talent as a war leader, believed he knew best. The disagreements rumbled on for the majority of August, as valuable time to completely crush the Soviets was lost. This respite was just what the Red Army needed. By the middle of August, 200 fresh divisions had been brought west, and even if the Germans continued to outthink the Soviets, they would not outnumber them. Despite the oncoming numerical advantage, the ensuing Battle of Kiev was the biggest defeat ever felt by the Red Army in history, and as the Germans took the Uman Pocket, things weren't getting better up north either. The symbolic city of Leningrad had been besieged from mid-September and 300 civilians were dying every day in the former Russian capital, where starvation had seen the population resort to eating cats, dogs and birds. There were even reports of cannibalism.



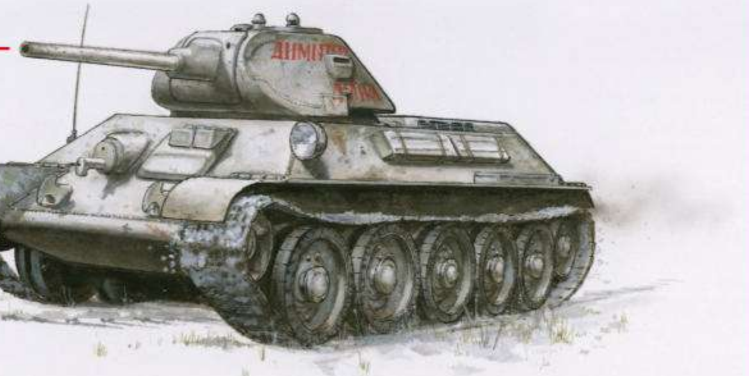
Cramped interior
The interior of the T-34 was not ergonomically ideal as its crew operated in cramped positions for extended periods.

Turret
The compact two-man turret of the early T-34 required the commander to aim the main gun, reducing combat efficiency.

Wide tracks
The T-34's wide tracks provided stability to the tank's chassis and improved cross-country performance, particularly in snow or muddy terrain.

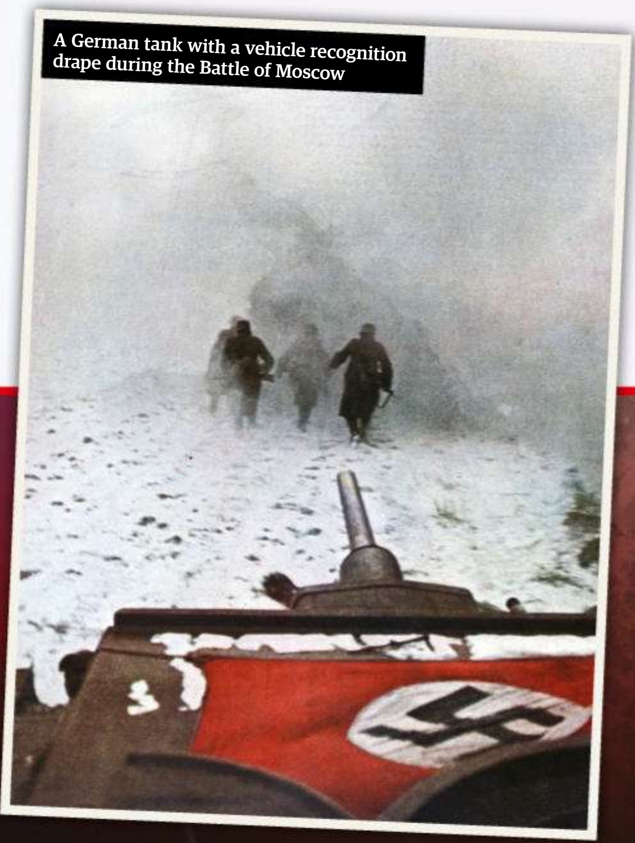
Suspension system
American Walter Christie designed the suspension system of the T-34, which was common among Soviet tanks of World War II.

Engine
The T-34 was powered by a V-2-34 V-12 diesel engine generating 500 horsepower and a top speed of 53 kilometres per hour.



RED ARMY WORKHORSE

The Soviet T-34 is thought to be the most formidable tank of World War II



A German tank with a vehicle recognition drape during the Battle of Moscow

OPERATION TYPHOON

After the successes in both the north and south, it was time for the Ostheer to deliver the killing blow: Moscow. The assault got under way in October as Vyazma, a town 200 kilometres south of Moscow, was taken. The victories just kept coming as Kalinin and Bryansk also fell. Moscow was nearing.

In the city, the scene was one of panic. Two million people had fled the capital and the Soviet government had been relocated to Kuybyshev (now Samara) 800 kilometres to the east. One man who didn't quake in his boots was Georgy Zhukov. With Imperial Japan no longer posing a threat to the Soviet Far East - thanks in part to his critical victory at Khalkhin Gol in 1939 - he mobilised 900,000 recruits from the eastern military districts to combat the Germans in the west. The Ostheer were just 65 kilometres from the gates of Moscow and could see the light of anti-aircraft fire over the city, but they were unable to advance any further. The Soviet strategy was now to attack the energy-sapped and sleep-deprived Germans as much as possible, using the fresh troops, with adverse weather giving the Red Army plenty of time to regroup and consolidate its positions. Now a long way from Berlin, German intelligence began to falter. High Command severely underestimated the amount of troops the USSR could call on and their prediction of 50 reserve Red Army divisions was woefully inadequate.

By mid-November, the Rasputitsa autumn rains had ceased and the muddy quagmire had hardened, allowing large-scale offensives to recommence. The Germans were now running through Moscow's suburbs and could see the sun glistening on the Kremlin. The heat of battle was fierce as the Red Army fought tooth and nail for the salvation of their capital. Something had to give, and it did, as the coldest winter for 140 years gripped the Soviet Union.

"FOR ALL MILITARY PURPOSES, SOVIET RUSSIA IS DONE WITH. THE BRITISH DREAM OF A TWO-FRONT WAR IS DEAD"
COMMANDER OF THE FIRST SS PANZER DIVISION, SEPP DIETTRICH, 9 OCTOBER 1941

A Wehrmacht soldier keeps an eye out for unexpected Russian attacks

GENERAL FROST

The Soviets were prepared for the sub-zero temperatures, equipped with padded winter clothing and specialist units - including ski troops and sleds for transporting guns and artillery. The Germans, meanwhile, had nothing of the sort. Hitler's confidence of a swift victory meant that few of the soldiers had winter clothing to keep the frost at bay and the results were devastating. Guns jammed and gloved fingers struggled to work them loose, rations froze with stews turning to hunks of ice, engines seized up for want of antifreeze, and intense blizzards grounded the Luftwaffe. The frostbite was so bad that 14,000 soldiers had their limbs amputated and the Ostheer's supply train, which was overly dependent on horses, was crippled. The Red Army counterattack on 5 December hit hard as 88 Soviet divisions ploughed into German lines over an 800-kilometre front.

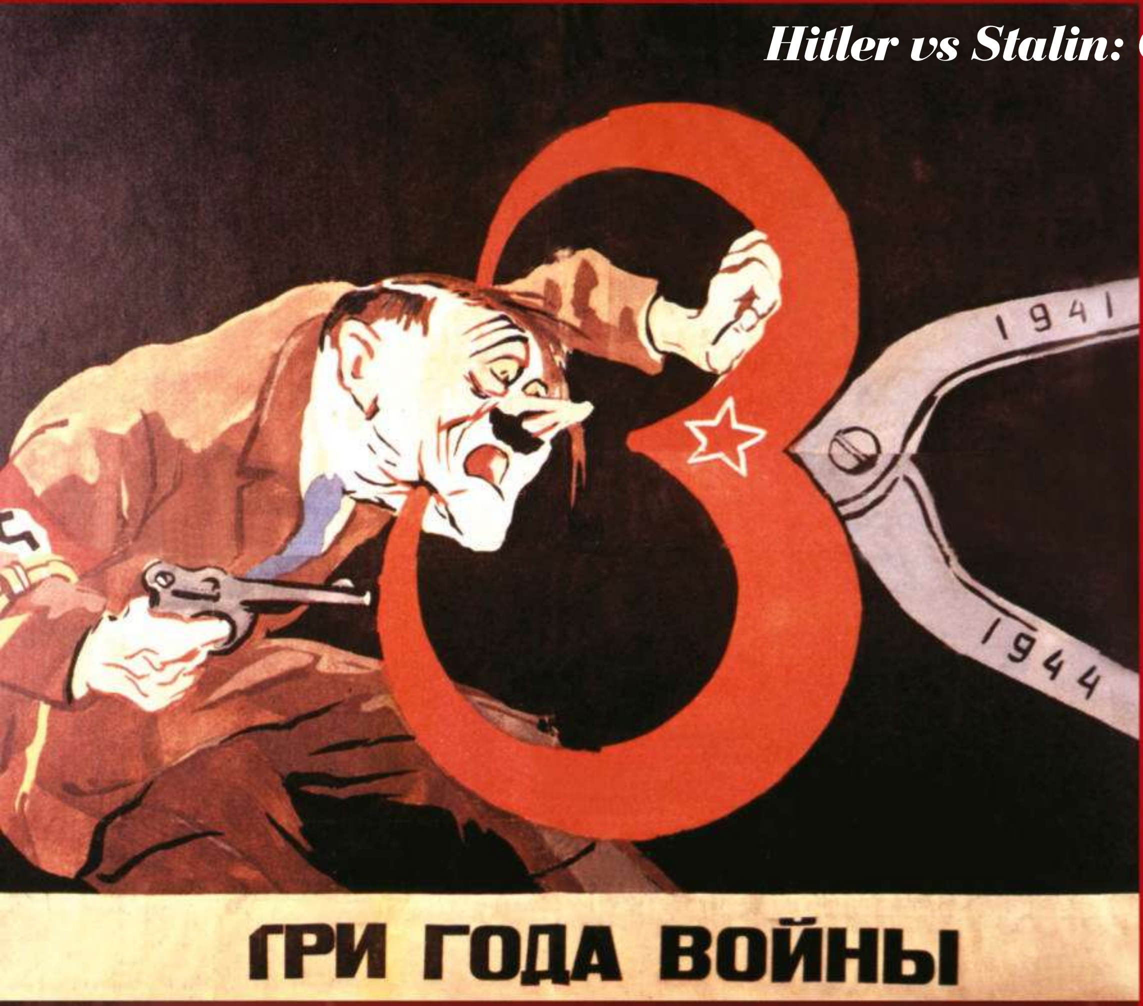
This crushed the resolve of the already weary Germans but Hitler was not one to admit defeat and ordered von Bock to hold his ground. The decision was pigheaded at best and represented the Führer's overconfidence as a general. The Red Army advance initiated a series of losses for the Wehrmacht, enraging Hitler. Von Rundstedt, von Brauchitsch and von Bock were all relieved of their duties as Hitler shuffled his pack. Günther von Kluge was promoted to field marshal while Hitler himself took over as supreme commander. The changes didn't have the desired effect and a tactical retreat was ordered as the panzer divisions withdrew 322 kilometres west to the starting place of Operation Typhoon. Barbarossa had failed.

> "THE WIND STABS YOU IN THE FACE WITH NEEDLES AND BLASTS THROUGH YOUR PROTECTIVE HEADGEAR AND YOUR GLOVES. YOUR EYES ARE STREAMING SO MUCH YOU CAN HARDLY SEE A THING"
>
> WEHRMACHT GENERAL GOTTHARD HEINRICI ON THE HARSH CONDITIONS

THE LAKE LADOGA LIFELINE

Hitler coveted Leningrad as it was the symbolic centre of communism - the heart of the October Revolution of 1917 - and its successful invasion would be an ideological victory. Rail and land connections to the rest of the USSR were severed on 30 August as Nazi command decided to besiege the city. The only chance for Leningrad lay in Lake Lagoda, which was already providing a natural barrier, dividing German and Finnish co-belligerents. The lake froze over in November 1941 allowing lorries to transport supplies into the city, providing relief. The incoming resources from the ice road weren't enough to completely sustain the city but the natural highway helped keep the city alive until it was liberated in January 1944 after more than 900 days of siege.

For its citizens' immense bravery and stamina, Leningrad was named a hero city by the Soviet government in 1945



WHY HITLER LOST

Despite the Nazi war machine's initial victories as the armoured spearheads of Operation Barbarossa struck deep across the expanse of Russia, killing or capturing millions of Red Army soldiers, Adolf Hitler had failed to reckon with several salient points that condemned the Wehrmacht to defence, decline and defeat on the Eastern Front. Expecting a rapid advance to victory, Hitler underestimated the resolve of his communist enemy and the steely, ruthless determination of Josef Stalin once the Soviet Union was plunged into war.

As the Germans marched from victory to victory, overconfidence gripped the Führer and his senior commanders. However, by the autumn of 1941, the situation had begun to take on a different character. While Hitler meddled with the conduct of the offensive both strategically and tactically, Red Army counterattacks and then seemingly endless rain, mud and snow combined to slow the triumphant Nazi tide. For the German soldier, an ill wind blew across Russia with the winter of 1941. Often with nothing more substantial than their summer uniforms to protect against the bitter cold, men were incapacitated or simply froze to death. Engines and weapons became inoperable. A mechanised army ground to a chilling halt. Panzer commanders peered through field glasses at the domes of Moscow fewer than 20 kilometres away.

When Hitler turned his tanks towards Stalingrad and the oil fields of the Caucasus the following summer, only death and destruction awaited his powerful Sixth Army and the once seemingly invincible Wehrmacht formations. Eventually an inexorable wave of Soviet retribution roared across eastern Europe and into the streets of Berlin. On the Eastern Front, Hitler's reach had exceeded his grasp, revealing the Führer's destiny to die, along with his dream of world domination, amid the rubble of his capital city.

> "THEY ARE EVERYWHERE PUSHING THROUGH THE WIDE GAPS THAT HAVE OPENED UP IN OUR FRONT. THE RETREAT IN SNOW AND ICE IS ABSOLUTELY NAPOLEONIC IN ITS MANNER. THE LOSSES ARE THE SAME"
>
> GENERAL GOTTHARD HEINRICI, WHO SERVED IN THE FOURTH ARMY UNDER VON KLUGE, 22 DECEMBER 1941

© Alamy, Getty Images, Joe Cummings, Ed Crooks

THE SHEER SCALE OF OPERATION BARBAROSSA

The Wehrmacht boasted a total of

134 DIVISIONS at full fighting strength + **73** DIVISIONS for deployment behind the front

300,000 FINNS

3.5 MILLION GERMAN TROOPS

1 MILLION GERMAN ALLIED TROOPS

50,000 SLOVAKIAN TROOPS

250,000 ROMANIANS

THE GERMANS HAD

3,580 TANKS

2,700 AIRCRAFT

500,000 TRUCKS

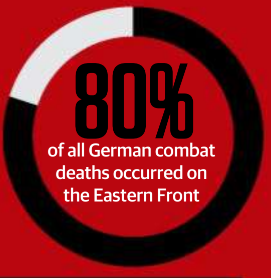
7,184 GUNS

The capture of Kiev took

665,000 PRISONERS

884 TANKS

3,000 GUNS



80% of all German combat deaths occurred on the Eastern Front

175
9

DIEPPE RAID

DIEPPE, FRANCE 19 AUGUST 1942

Summer 1942 and World War II is looking grim for the Allies. A Nazi invasion of Britain may no longer be a possibility but the progress of the Wehrmacht deep into Soviet territory on the Eastern Front and the mobilisation of the Japanese in the Pacific reveals an Axis-dominated world. As the Red Army retreats further, a siege on Stalingrad is just months away. Bolstering the German resolve, Reich minister of propaganda Joseph Goebbels has just launched the *Festung Europa* (Fortress Europe) propaganda material, aimed at keeping mainland Europe in the hands of the Third Reich. With Stalin calling for aid from the West, now was the time for the British to put the ghosts of Dunkirk to rest and return to the continent with a decisive hammer blow against the Nazis.

The northwest boundary of the Third Reich was considered the weakest and the best place to strike. The Allied generals were right to believe this, as the best Wehrmacht divisions were engaging the Red Army on the Eastern Front. The Axis forces defending the Normandy coastline were made up of new, fresh-faced recruits who weren't ready to join the brutality of Germany's Operation Barbarossa in the east. With only foreign conscripts to boost the ranks of the German 302nd Static Infantry Division, Dieppe was one of the weakest areas of the Reich. The coastal town was seen as an ideal location for the Allies to establish a foothold in occupied France and was chosen for the first amphibious assaults. This plan had been in the making since 1940 and was simple: vanquish the defenders, establish a perimeter, destroy the port and then withdraw. The aim was not to create a lasting beachhead – the raid of Dieppe would be a shock event opening up France's western coast for future attacks, a plan that would eventually morph into Operation Overlord. Tactics and strategies were repeatedly practised by commandos in the UK as preparation for the largest combined operation of the war gathered pace. The operation was to include many Canadians from the country's 2nd Infantry Division, who were embarking on what would be one of Canada's major contributions to the Allied war effort. Both the British and Canadian governments were keen for the troops from the New World to gain battle experience and Dieppe was seen as an ideal opportunity. By 1942, Canada had a full commitment to the Allies after previously contributing an all-volunteer formation. Major General Roberts took the reins of the Canadian battalions in late 1941 and based his leadership on a fresh impetus of training and performance to bring the recruits up to scratch. The new training programmes were based on the Isle of Wight and were an undoubted success, boosting both morale and fighting ability in the lead up to Dieppe. The population back in Canada were excited to hear that their boys were in the thick of the action in Europe at last.

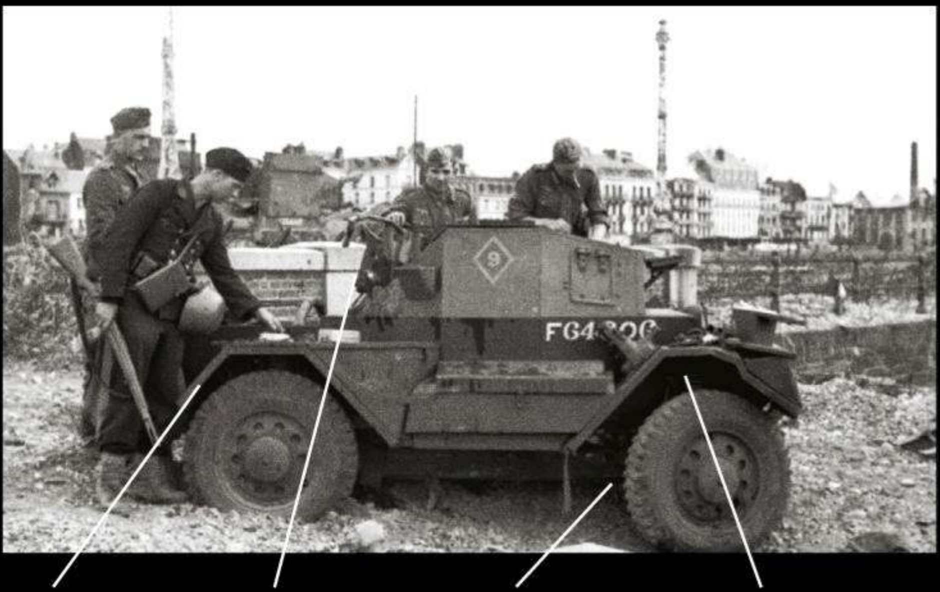
Opening a new Western Front

The idea was good but the prospect was daunting. France had been occupied for a long period and the Wehrmacht were deeply rooted in fortifications across the Channel. Cover for the raid could be provided by the RAF, but the Luftwaffe were still a threat to any offensive. The initial plan was known as Operation Rutter and was the brainchild of the Combined Operations HQ, with input from General Montgomery and the prime minister himself, Winston Churchill. The bulk of the assault would be led by British parachute units, who would distract German batteries on the headlands while the full force of the Navy and Army moved in. The attack was rigorously rehearsed and eventually satisfied Montgomery enough for him to give it the green light for 4 July. However, after continuous bad weather and repeated postponements, the operation was scrapped and its codename changed to Operation Jubilee. Montgomery was summoned to North Africa and the raid at Dieppe would now be orchestrated by Lord Louis Mountbatten, the chief of combined operations, and would take place on 19 August, the final day that tides would suit the British troops.

The change wasn't just in name – the whole nature of the raid was altered. Air bombardment would be minimal so the port could be used by the British in the future and was reduced to priority targets only; destroyers were preferred over battleships to bombard the shoreline with support fire. The parachute operation was cancelled and instead the commandos would arrive by gunboat after the main force had assaulted the mainland. The Allied forces would depart from five ports between Southampton and Newhaven on England's south coast. The commandos would attack first in the early hours followed by engineers and demolition parties, who would take down telephone lines, railway tracks and power stations. Specialised enemy equipment and Wehrmacht plans were also sought after, especially in the radar site in nearby Pourville.

Operation Jubilee looked good on paper but, in reality, the Germans were more prepared than many in the British military and political hierarchy had assumed that they were. The intelligence on the German positions was average at best and, almost unbelievably, there were even reports that the suitability of the beaches for mechanised divisions was judged by old holiday photos. Worse still, French double agents had alerted the Wehrmacht generals to the British plans for Dieppe, so beach exits were blocked by barbed wire and concrete walls with pillboxes, and roadblocks were erected along the shoreline.

The Daimler Dingo

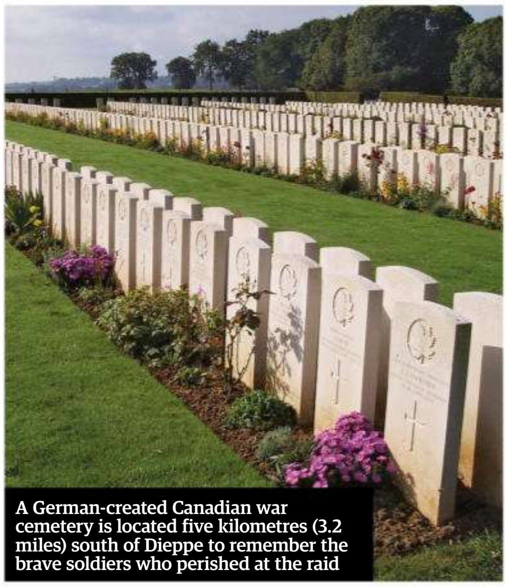


Armour
The armour was originally thin but was strengthened to sloped 30mm (1.18in) panels in later models to protected the vehicle against most firearms.

Role
A two-man vehicle, the Dingo was used for reconnaissance and as a speedy transport for officers and commanders across the beach.

Off-road
As adept off road as it was on, the Dingo could reach speeds of 88km/h (55mph). More than 6,000 were made in the duration of the war.

Capture
Dingo's were just one of the Allied vehicles captured at Dieppe as the fleeing troops left behind Churchill tanks, equipment and weapons.



A German-created Canadian war cemetery is located five kilometres (3.2 miles) south of Dieppe to remember the brave soldiers who perished at the raid

Worse still, four alert and briefed German regiments lay waiting for the Allies.

The raid begins

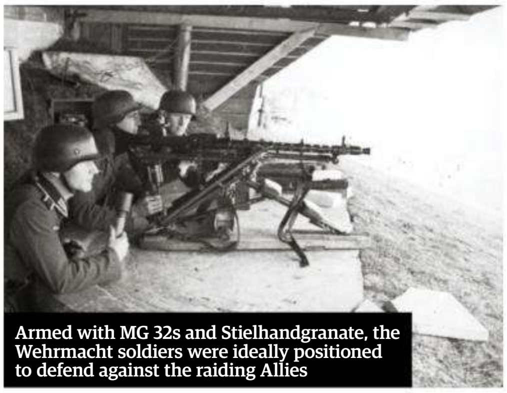
As the Allied forces approached the coast at 3am on 19 August, the 4,963 Canadian troops may have allowed themselves to dwell on the somewhat meaningful coincidence that Dieppe was the port that the first French settlers departed from for New France in 1632. But the opportunity for reverie was soon over; the operation was now in full flow and would be divided into two phases. Firstly, assault troops would strike artillery positions at Berneval and Varengeville at daybreak. This would be followed by an all out assault on the harbour, making up the second phase. The operation was so large that regular troops were called in to supplement the commandos. Minimal air cover was sanctioned to maintain secrecy but more than 60 fighter squadrons were ready to be deployed if the operation went south. The British and Canadians would also be joined by 50 US Rangers, the first Americans to fight in German-occupied Europe during the war.

Before the first Allied troops reached dry land, the British convoy had already hit trouble. A small band of German ships had found the Royal Navy and opened fire. The resistance was beaten off but the battle had awoken the Germans in Dieppe who, unknown to the British, were already manning their positions. The element of surprise had already been lost and the now-late landing craft had a tough battle getting to the shore with MG 34 bullets raining down from the pillboxes. Without the element of surprise or the cover of darkness, the attack on the beaches was going to be tougher than had been foreseen. Even second-rate Wehrmacht troops could man a machine gun and fire on scattered and ill-commanded Allied troops. The main assault on the central beaches was led by the No.3 Commando Regiment, which was bogged down from the start with only 18 men arriving in the planned location. They were quickly

As well as prisoners of war, the occupying German forces also gained tanks and much more Allied equipment

overwhelmed by repeated fire from the cliffs and were forced to go on the defensive. 20 commandos managed to get 180 metres (590 feet) from the German battery and greatly aided the landing process, using their sniper rifles to stop the guns being aimed on the landing ships bringing more troops onto the beach.

The regiments further up the coast weren't faring much better. At Puys, an extremely narrow and steep beach secured by a heavily wired seawall had pinned down the disorganised Royal Regiment of Canada and they were forced to surrender after the loss of 200 men. Evacuation proved impossible with the sheer amount of German fire and for the Canadians, this was to remain the largest loss of life in one day they endured for the entire war.



Armed with MG 32s and Stielhandgranate, the Wehrmacht soldiers were ideally positioned to defend against the raiding Allies

Down the coast at Pourville, the Canadian Forces' South Saskatchewan Regiment and Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders had been more successful, crossing the only bridge over the River Scie (after landing on the wrong side) and making inroads into the mainland. They were forced to withdraw, however, just before they reached their objective, a German-held airfield. The No 4 Commando Regiment fared the best, landing as planned and destroying a strong Wehrmacht battery of six 15-centimetre guns at Varengeville before extracting safely and efficiently by 7.30am. By the end of the raid, they were the only unit to complete all of their objectives.

Allies

TROOPS 6,106

LOSSES 4,384

LEADERS

LORD LOUIS MOUNTBATTEN, MAJOR GENERAL JOHN HAMILTON ROBERTS

GAME CHANGERS

The newly minted British commandos had been well drilled while the Canadian regiments were eager to taste battle and made up the majority of the forces.

Germans

TROOPS 1,500

LOSSES 591

LEADERS

FIELD MARSHAL GERD VON RUNDSTEDT, LT GENERAL KONRAD HAASE

GAME CHANGERS

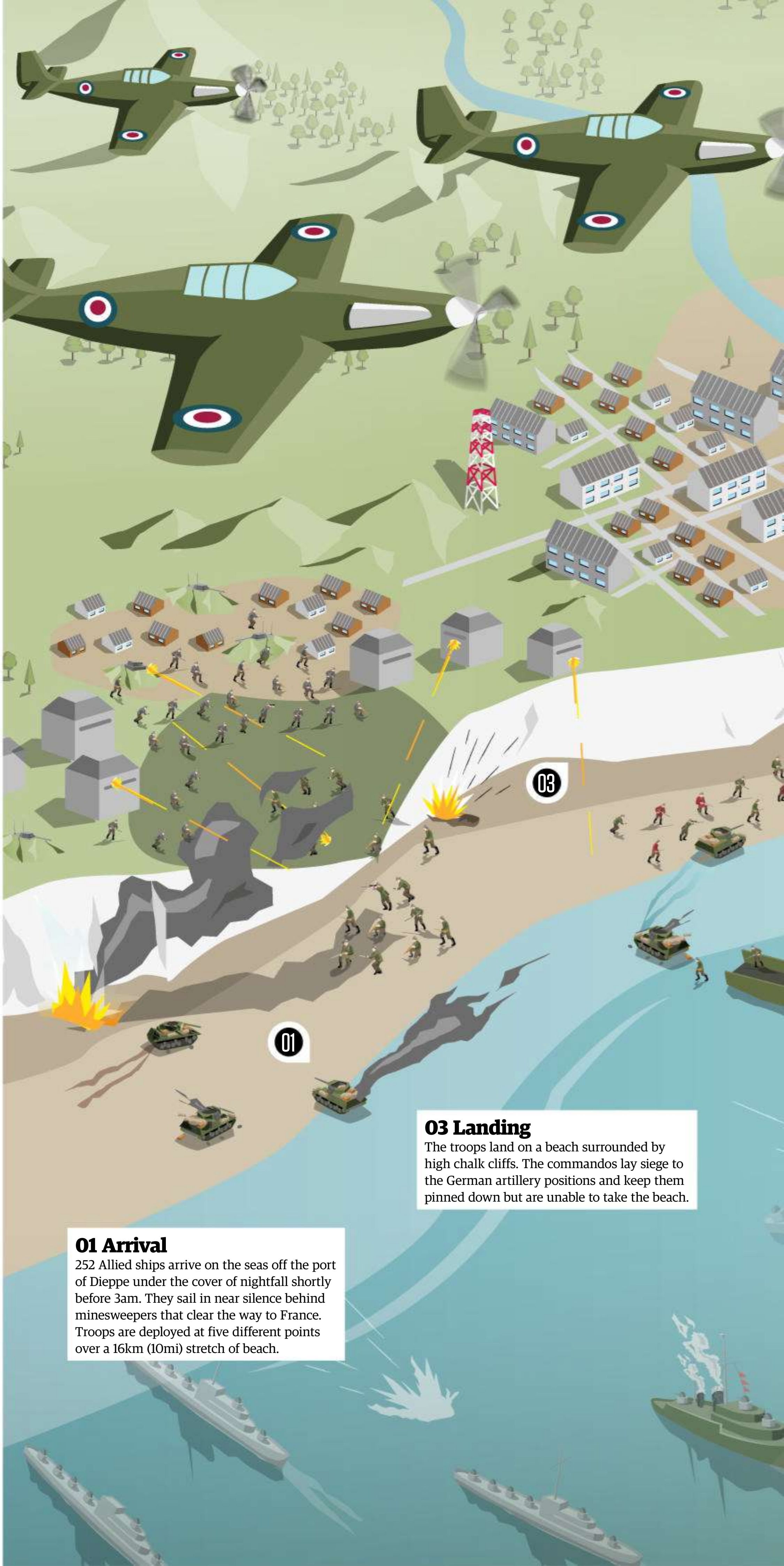
Dieppe had been under German command for two years, had natural defences and a Wehrmacht keen to defend 'Fortress Europe'. Infantry's tenacious defence.

Renewed assault

The initial attacks had mostly faltered but there was still hope for the operation to succeed as the main central assault got underway at about 5.20am. Led by the 14th Army Tank Battalion (Calgary Regiment), the Essex Scottish Regiment and the Royal Hamilton Light Infantry, a number of new Churchill tanks were unleashed on the beaches with the aim of taking down the German resistance by demolishing walls and obliterating defensive positions. Unfortunately for the British, only 27 of the 58 tanks made it ashore and when they arrived, were grossly underprepared for what awaited them. Rather embarrassingly, many of the Churchills became stuck on the beach as the loose shingle wreaked havoc with the tank's tracks. The mechanical monsters were now sitting helplessly under the machine guns and were picked off one by one. For the 15 tanks that made it through the shingle, there was no respite. Heavily damaged from the machine gun crossfire, the tanks were unable to traverse the concrete roadblocks set up to repel them. The biggest losers in this debacle were the overworked Canadian engineers, who, in their attempts to repair the tracks, were gunned down by the machine guns. 31 Royal Engineers died in total. Whatever hope the Churchills had of making it further died too with the ineffective supporting fire from the offshore destroyers.

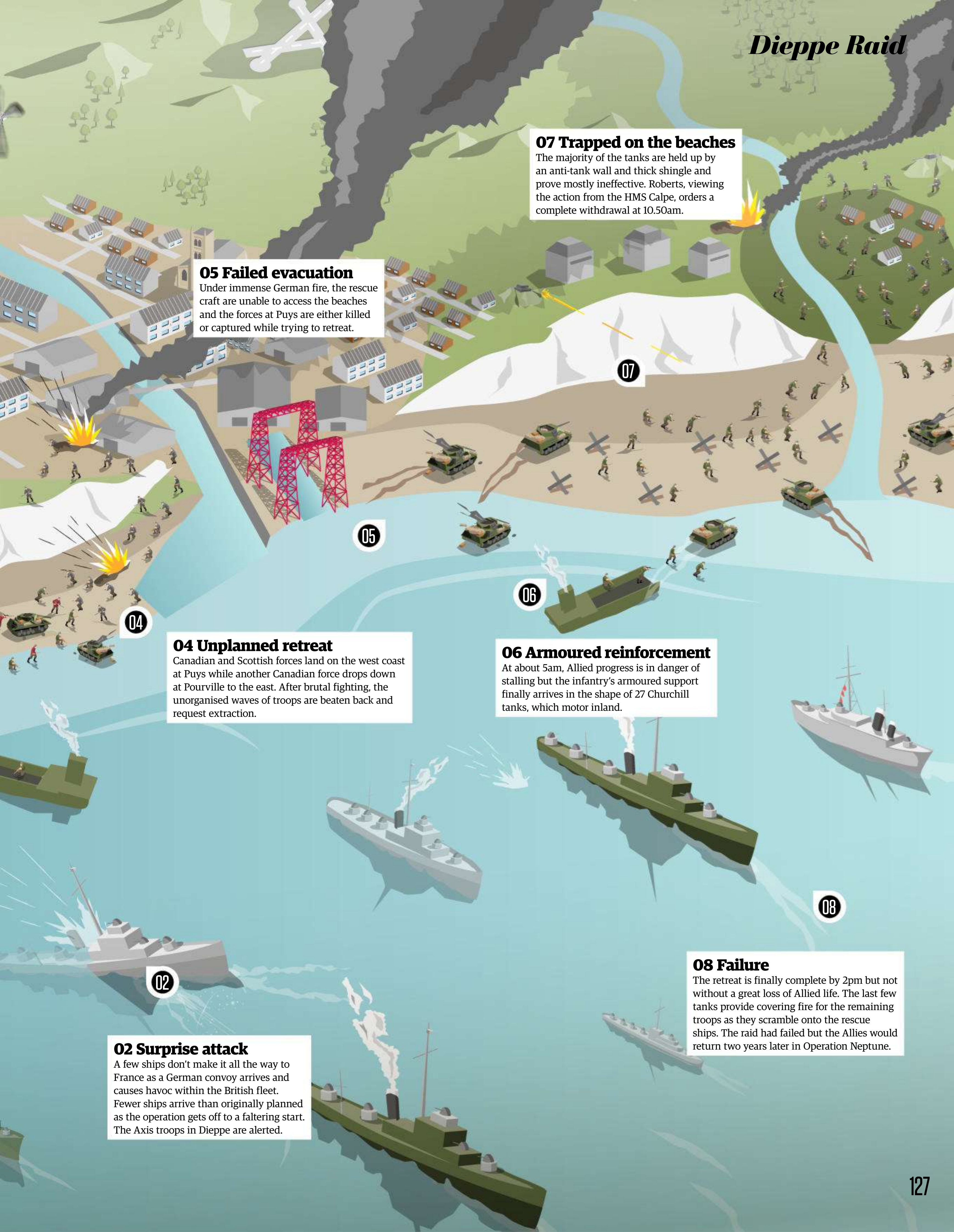
Not all of the conflict was on the beaches. Some platoons made it to the town centre where they engaged in vicious street-to-street fighting and managed to clear a heavily defended former casino acting as a centre of Nazi activity in the area. The leaders of the operation were not able to act appropriately due to the smokescreen obscuring their view of the battlefield and a lack of intelligence coming back from the beaches. All they had to go on was fragments of radio messages intermittently returning to the destroyers'

> "Now was the time for the British forces to put the ghosts of Dunkirk to rest for good and return to the continent with a decisive hammer blow against the Nazis"



03 Landing
The troops land on a beach surrounded by high chalk cliffs. The commandos lay siege to the German artillery positions and keep them pinned down but are unable to take the beach.

01 Arrival
252 Allied ships arrive on the seas off the port of Dieppe under the cover of nightfall shortly before 3am. They sail in near silence behind minesweepers that clear the way to France. Troops are deployed at five different points over a 16km (10mi) stretch of beach.



07 Trapped on the beaches

The majority of the tanks are held up by an anti-tank wall and thick shingle and prove mostly ineffective. Roberts, viewing the action from the HMS Calpe, orders a complete withdrawal at 10.50am.

05 Failed evacuation

Under immense German fire, the rescue craft are unable to access the beaches and the forces at Puys are either killed or captured while trying to retreat.

04 Unplanned retreat

Canadian and Scottish forces land on the west coast at Puys while another Canadian force drops down at Pourville to the east. After brutal fighting, the unorganised waves of troops are beaten back and request extraction.

06 Armoured reinforcement

At about 5am, Allied progress is in danger of stalling but the infantry's armoured support finally arrives in the shape of 27 Churchill tanks, which motor inland.

08 Failure

The retreat is finally complete by 2pm but not without a great loss of Allied life. The last few tanks provide covering fire for the remaining troops as they scramble onto the rescue ships. The raid had failed but the Allies would return two years later in Operation Neptune.

02 Surprise attack

A few ships don't make it all the way to France as a German convoy arrives and causes havoc within the British fleet. Fewer ships arrive than originally planned as the operation gets off to a faltering start. The Axis troops in Dieppe are alerted.

communications. One of these messages led to an unplanned move as Roberts changed tactics, ordering the reserve Les Fusiliers Mont-Royal to enter the fray. The hastily arranged action was now changed to moving through the town and attacking the east headland battery of German positions. The rushed brief, naturally, caused confusion in the ranks and the reinforcements had next to no effect on the outcome of the raid. A withdrawal of the Allied regiments was ordered as the clock struck 11am.

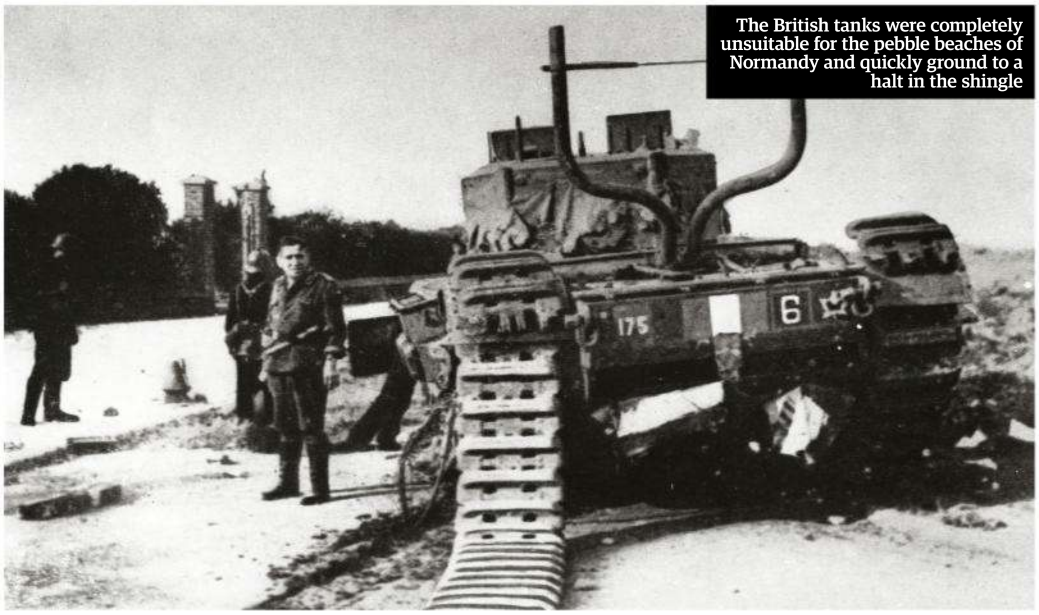
Cutting losses

The evacuation lasted for three hours as the Royal Navy struggled to withdraw its troops while under attack from the relentless Wehrmacht and Luftwaffe. Unable to move, the remaining operational Churchill tanks provided covering fire for the retreating soldiers as the infantry withdrew. After their job was done, the crews were pulled from their tanks by the Germans and taken prisoner. Even the four destroyers, Calpe, Fernie, Berkeley and Albrighton, failed to keep the Germans at bay, their four-inch guns weaker than the onslaught coming from the land. Despite their best efforts, in nine hours a total of 3,367 Canadians were killed, wounded or taken prisoner along with 275 British commandos. Overall, 4,384 were killed or wounded – 73 per cent of the force. One destroyer was lost (HMS Berkeley) and 550 perished in the ranks of the Royal Navy. The RAF had 106 aircraft downed to the Luftwaffe's 48. The planes lost by the RAF were the most lost in one day during the whole war. The death toll for the Germans was much lower at 591; they also claimed all of the Allied equipment left on the beaches. Luckily, the Axis soldiers held their positions and did not pursue the convoy into the Channel. Tragically, the injured left on the beach after the evacuation were captured or left to wash away with the dead in the rising tide.

Two Victoria Crosses were given to the Canadians on the day. Honorary Captain JW Foote of the Royal Hamilton Light Infantry received a medal his for his care of the wounded troops strewn across the beaches while Lieutenant Colonel CCI Merritt was awarded his honours for bravely leading his men over the Pourville Bridge. Both were taken prisoner.

> "The landing craft had a tough battle getting to the shore with MG 34 bullets raining down from the pillboxes"

The amount of POWs was staggering with more than 2,000 captured and sent to Nazi prisoner of war camps



The British tanks were completely unsuitable for the pebble beaches of Normandy and quickly ground to a halt in the shingle

A member of the Wehrmacht's Medical Corps gives a wounded British soldier first aid

A costly but necessary failure

After the dust had settled, the debrief back at HQ revealed what had gone wrong. A combination of poor planning and leadership, not helped by some terrible luck, had doomed Operation Jubilee to failure. The debacle made headlines around the world and the Canadian public were shocked at the failure and the loss of life by their countrymen in the 2nd Infantry Division. The Canadians who didn't perish were sent to the Stalag VIII prisoner of war camp in Poland for the remainder of the war. The conditions here were miserable, with prisoners' hands shackled together and awful treatment from the guards. Even when the war was over, the former prisoners were forced to march west, living off the land, to get beyond the oncoming Iron Curtain. The failure at Dieppe had a longer lasting effect than many knew. At HQ, Mountbatten received the lion's share of the criticism, many seeing his lack of preparation as the reason for the mission's failure. The true blame lay at the feet of the chiefs of staff of all three forces who had acted flippantly to push the landings forward. The most experienced leaders, such as Montgomery and General Sir Alan Brooke, were preoccupied with the North African theatre and it seemed as if the planning for Dieppe was undercooked, especially as it was left in the hands of the relatively inexperienced Mountbatten.

> "The debacle made headlines around the world and the Canadian public back home were shocked at the failure and the loss of life by their countrymen"

Many were also perplexed at to why the Canadian commanders, whose men were such a huge part of the operation, were not involved in the planning procedure for either Rutter or Jubilee. More than 1,000 Canadian and British soldiers lay dead on the French coast, but the Allied hierarchy would not make this same mistake again. The need for more air support was recognised, specialised landing craft were developed, naval gunfire was upped and intelligence and planning became stricter than ever before. They also planned for better communication and more flexibility in future operations. Essentially, a Plan B was a must. The failure of the Dieppe Raid was a lesson that had to be learned, and when D-Day was unleashed on Normandy on 6 June 1944, there would be no defeat.

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D-DAY LANDINGS

NORMANDY, FRANCE 6 JUNE 1944

At approximately 6.30am he fell heavily, his pack lurching forward and with it his shoulders as the murky grey water hit him like a wall. He stumbled, the press of bodies behind him caring little for his lack of balance – only for their orders and whistling of bullets overhead, the steady crunch of artillery and the rattle of machine guns from the horizon where the sand became hillside. A hand took his shoulder roughly, scooping him up and pushing him forward in one smooth motion. He didn't hear what was being shouted, but he understood the message. If he didn't keep going, he would die here.

Five hours and 12 minutes before the 8th Infantry Regiment crashed from their landing craft and onto Utah Beach and a soldier lurched into murky grey waters, another military man exhaled steadily to bury his nerves. Wind rushed through the open hatch of the transport plane as it lurched drunkenly like a child's kite in a gale, tracer fire lighting up the sky around them as the German guns came alive. In the gloom, men smoked in silence – some prayed. The order was given and the red light flicked on, as one they came to their feet – cigarettes extinguished and prayers incomplete. He jumped and France rushed up to meet him.

That same night, perhaps 30 or 40 minutes before the Screaming Eagles of the 101st Airborne leaped from their planes into the darkness of Normandy, British prime minister Winston Churchill turned from the window. He was late to bed by habit, but to his wife, Clementine, he looked restless. His features softened momentarily from the patrician scowl of a thousand newsreels, but you'd have to know him as she did to notice. "Do you realise", he said suddenly, taking the cigar from his lips, "that by the time you wake up in the morning, 20,000 men may have been killed?"

Churchill's fears of a catastrophic death toll awaiting the Allies and the fact that US troops were first onto the beaches and first from the planes was linked. From back when the US had joined the war in December 1941, Churchill had been deferring Roosevelt's steadily more forceful pleas to take the war to France – instead they concentrated on efforts in North Africa and Italy. To Churchill's mind, Italy was the 'soft underbelly' of the Axis, but to the US, they were simply protecting Britain's vulnerable colonies.

If Churchill was haunted by the losses the British suffered in WWI, then his fears manoeuvred him toward a similar strategic conceit. Like his bloody Turkish beachhead at Gallipoli, Italy was a tougher nut to crack and the 'soft underbelly' had turned into a gruelling crawl up the mountainous peninsula. Stalin too was adding pressure to open a second front and to divide German forces from the epic slaughter going on in the frozen east.

Britain, its Commonwealth and its empire might have 'stood alone' in defence of Western democracy for the first two years of the war, but now they looked to be sidelined. Domestic US politics

THE LANDINGS

THE DEPLOYMENT OF ALLIED TROOPS ON 6 JUNE, D-DAY

Commander in Chief Air Force:
Air Chief Marshall Trafford Leigh-Mallory

1ST US ARMY

Commander: General Omar Bradley

VII CORPS

Commander: Major General JL Collins

4th Infantry Division 'Ivy'
Commander: Major General Raymond Barton
Objective: First troops onto Utah Beach.

9th Infantry Division 'Old Reliables'
Commander: Major General Manton S Eddy
Objective: Take and hold Utah Beach.

79th Infantry Division 'Cross of Lorraine'
Commander: Major General Ira T Wyche
Objective: Take and hold Utah Beach.

90th Infantry Division 'Tough 'Ombres'
Commander: Brig-General Jay W MacKelvie
Objective: Take and hold Utah Beach.

30 Commando Assault Unit 'Red Indians' (British)
Commander: Captain G Pike **Objective:** Take radar station at Douvres-la-Delivrande.

70th Tank Batalion 'Thunderbolts'
Commander: Lt-Colonel John C Welborn
Objective: Support landing at Utah Beach.

237th Combat Engineer Battalion
Commander: Major Herschel E Linn
Objective: Clear mines and obstacles at Utah Beach.

299th Combat Engineer Battalion
Commander: Colonel Milton Jewett
Objective: Clear mines and obstacles at Utah Beach.

Utah

V CORPS

Commander: Major General Leonard T Gerow

1st Infantry Division 'The Big Red One'
Commander: Major General Clarence Huebner
Objective: Take and hold Omaha Beach.

29th Infantry Division 'Blue And Gray'
Commander: Major General Charles Gebhardt
Objective: Take and hold Omaha Beach.

Ranger assault group
Commander: Lieutenant Colonel James Earl Rudder

2nd Ranger Battalion
Commander: Lieutenant Colonel James Earl Rudder Objective: Capture battery at Pointe du Hoc.

5th Ranger Battalion
Commander: Lieutenant Colonel Max Schneider Objective: Capture battery at Pointe du Hoc.

Pointe du Hoc

743rd Tank Battalion
Commander: Lieutenant Colonel John S Upham
Objective: Support landing at Omaha Beach.

Omaha

Speciality Key

- Combat engineers
- Covert intelligence gathering
- Amphibious medium tank
- Light infantry, versatile and reliable
- Air assault, light infantry
- Special forces trained for coastal assault
- Infantry, special forces
- Infantry, Fast tank
- Mine clearance, bridging and transport

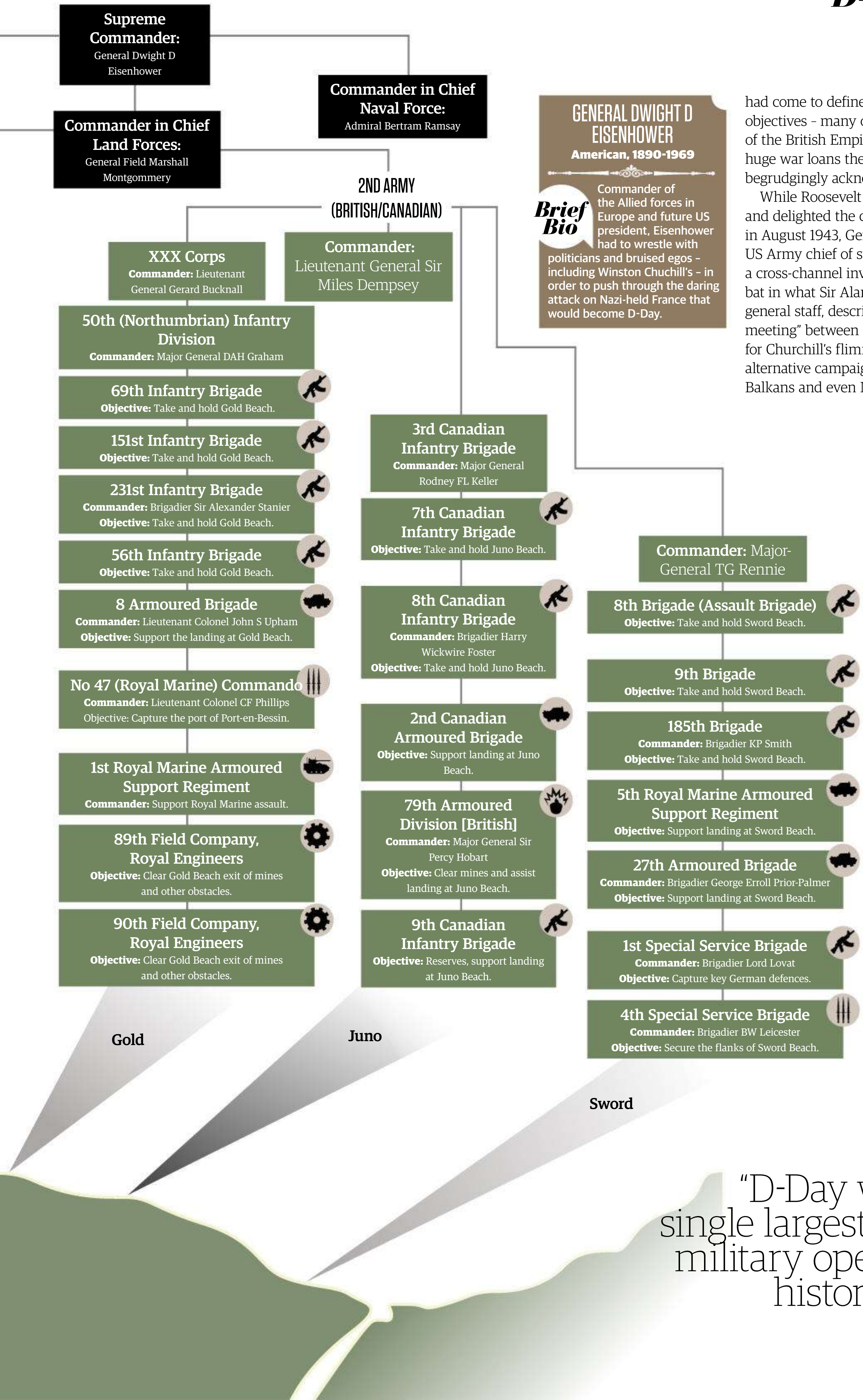
US troops look to the shore as their landing craft approaches Omaha Beach

INLAND

82nd Airborne Division 'All American Division'
Commander: Major General Matthew Ridgway
Objective: Secure left flank and rear of VI Corps.

101st Airborne Division 'Screaming Eagles'
Commander: Major General Maxwell D Taylor
Objective: Secure left flank and rear of VI Corps.

US Army Rangers at the cliffs of Pointe du Hoc



Supreme Commander:
General Dwight D Eisenhower

Commander in Chief Naval Force:
Admiral Bertram Ramsay

Commander in Chief Land Forces:
General Field Marshall Montgommery

2ND ARMY (BRITISH/CANADIAN)

Commander: Lieutenant General Sir Miles Dempsey

XXX Corps
Commander: Lieutenant General Gerard Bucknall

50th (Northumbrian) Infantry Division
Commander: Major General DAH Graham

69th Infantry Brigade
Objective: Take and hold Gold Beach.

151st Infantry Brigade
Objective: Take and hold Gold Beach.

231st Infantry Brigade
Commander: Brigadier Sir Alexander Stanier
Objective: Take and hold Gold Beach.

56th Infantry Brigade
Objective: Take and hold Gold Beach.

8 Armoured Brigade
Commander: Lieutenant Colonel John S Upham
Objective: Support the landing at Gold Beach.

No 47 (Royal Marine) Commando
Commander: Lieutenant Colonel CF Phillips
Objective: Capture the port of Port-en-Bessin.

1st Royal Marine Armoured Support Regiment
Commander: Support Royal Marine assault.

89th Field Company, Royal Engineers
Objective: Clear Gold Beach exit of mines and other obstacles.

90th Field Company, Royal Engineers
Objective: Clear Gold Beach exit of mines and other obstacles.

3rd Canadian Infantry Brigade
Commander: Major General Rodney FL Keller

7th Canadian Infantry Brigade
Objective: Take and hold Juno Beach.

8th Canadian Infantry Brigade
Commander: Brigadier Harry Wickwire Foster
Objective: Take and hold Juno Beach.

2nd Canadian Armoured Brigade
Objective: Support landing at Juno Beach.

79th Armoured Division [British]
Commander: Major General Sir Percy Hobart
Objective: Clear mines and assist landing at Juno Beach.

9th Canadian Infantry Brigade
Objective: Reserves, support landing at Juno Beach.

Commander: Major-General TG Rennie

8th Brigade (Assault Brigade)
Objective: Take and hold Sword Beach.

9th Brigade
Objective: Take and hold Sword Beach.

185th Brigade
Commander: Brigadier KP Smith
Objective: Take and hold Sword Beach.

5th Royal Marine Armoured Support Regiment
Objective: Support landing at Sword Beach.

27th Armoured Brigade
Commander: Brigadier George Erroll Prior-Palmer
Objective: Support landing at Sword Beach.

1st Special Service Brigade
Commander: Brigadier Lord Lovat
Objective: Capture key German defences.

4th Special Service Brigade
Commander: Brigadier BW Leicester
Objective: Secure the flanks of Sword Beach.

GENERAL DWIGHT D EISENHOWER

American, 1890-1969

Brief Bio

Commander of the Allied forces in Europe and future US president, Eisenhower had to wrestle with politicians and bruised egos – including Winston Chuchill's – in order to push through the daring attack on Nazi-held France that would become D-Day.

had come to define not just the war's long-term objectives – many of which, like the decolonisation of the British Empire and full repayment for the huge war loans the UK had incurred, Churchill begrudgingly acknowledged – but battlefield tactics.

While Roosevelt and Churchill made speeches and delighted the crowds at the Quebec Conference in August 1943, General George C Marshall, the US Army chief of staff and leading evangelist for a cross-channel invasion of France, went up to bat in what Sir Alan Brooke, chief of the imperial general staff, described in his diaries as a "painful meeting" between the Allies' top brass. His patience for Churchill's flimflam – the PM had suggested alternative campaigns in the Greek islands, the Balkans and even Norway – long since worn out, Marshall threw down an ultimatum: either Britain support a full-tilt invasion of France, or the US would drop the 'Germany First' strategy and concentrate all of its effort on defeating the Japanese in the Pacific. Under great secrecy, 1 May 1944 – later changed to 5 June – was nominated as the date in which Operation Overlord would begin. Normandy was chosen as the location over Brittany or the Cotentin Peninsula – both of which would make them vulnerable to encirclement – and the Pas de Calais, which though the shortest distance between Britain and France, was the most heavily fortified. US General Dwight D Eisenhower was appointed commander of Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF) – effectively all Allied forces in Europe – while British General Bernard Montgomery was named commander of the 21st Army Group, comprising all of 39 divisions taking part in the initial invasion.

D-Day would be the single largest amphibious military operation in the history of warfare, with its three original landing zones having been expanded to five. First the

> "D-Day would be the single largest amphibious military operation in the history of warfare"

Americans in Utah and Omaha, then an hour later the British and Canadians in Gold, June and Sword, covering an 80-kilometre (50-mile) stretch of the French coastline. The landing of 150,000 troops by sea, supported by naval bombardment, would be preceded by various daring parachute and glider drops further inland. Dropped from the skies above Normandy, 30,000 men of the US 82nd and 101st Airborne along with Canadian and British units of the 6th Airborne Division would be tasked with important tasks such as securing key bridges and crossroads, establishing useful river crossings and taking out artillery batteries.

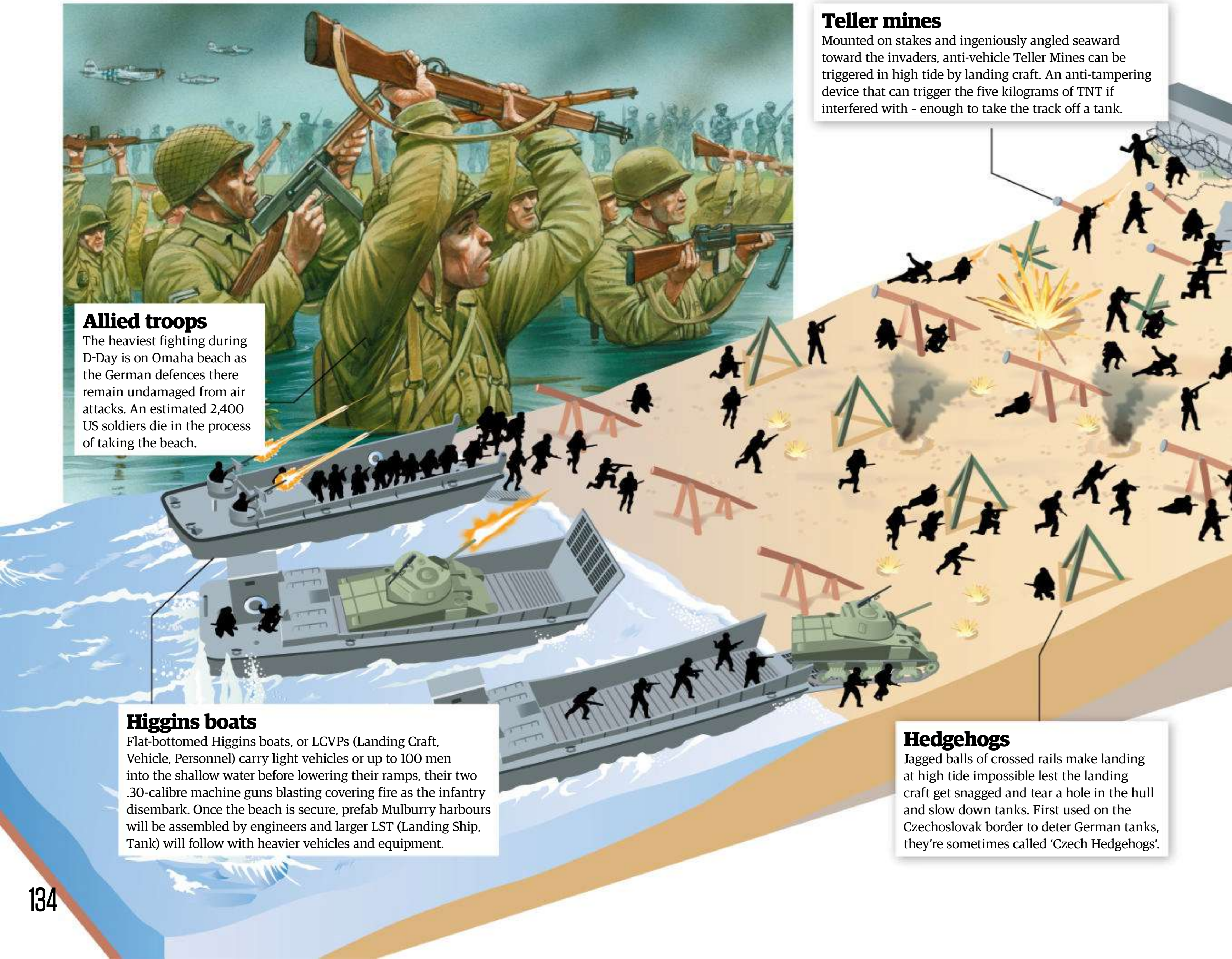
As their planning efforts intensified, Churchill found himself unable to make direct contact with the US president that he'd once written to so fondly as "your American cousin" and instead was fobbed off with the prickly marshal, the architect of the strategy that was causing the PM such anxiety in the first place. "Struck by how very tired and worn out the Prime Minister looks now", wrote Jock Colville, his private secretary.

> "Hitler and his generals remained convinced that an assault was most likely to come from Calais, where they concentrated their heavy defences"

Converted Cunard liners began to disgorge their cargo – both men and the equipment they would need – in preparation, turning the South of England into a vast khaki patchwork of army camps. Between January and June 1944, 700,000 US troops had arrived in Britain, adding to a total of around 2.88 million soldiers billeted around the country. Around 5 per cent of this number would take part in D-Day – the rest would be needed for the campaigns that followed.

When the first US troops arrived in North Africa in November 1942, they were raw. Fresh from basic training and flush with confidence, their learning curve had been steep and costly, but the generals that prepared for D-Day had experienced amphibious landings in Sicily and Italy – albeit not on this scale – and held no illusions about the strength of German defences. Nonetheless, training was thorough and the first large-scale exercise not only revealed systemic weaknesses in the Allied forces, but was a catastrophe on such a scale that D-Day was very nearly called off all together.

Slapton Sands in Devon had been chosen for its resemblance to Utah Beach, and on 22 April 1944, 30,000 troops, plus tanks and landing craft, prepared to take the sand from its defenders,



Teller mines
Mounted on stakes and ingeniously angled seaward toward the invaders, anti-vehicle Teller Mines can be triggered in high tide by landing craft. An anti-tampering device that can trigger the five kilograms of TNT if interfered with – enough to take the track off a tank.

Allied troops
The heaviest fighting during D-Day is on Omaha beach as the German defences there remain undamaged from air attacks. An estimated 2,400 US soldiers die in the process of taking the beach.

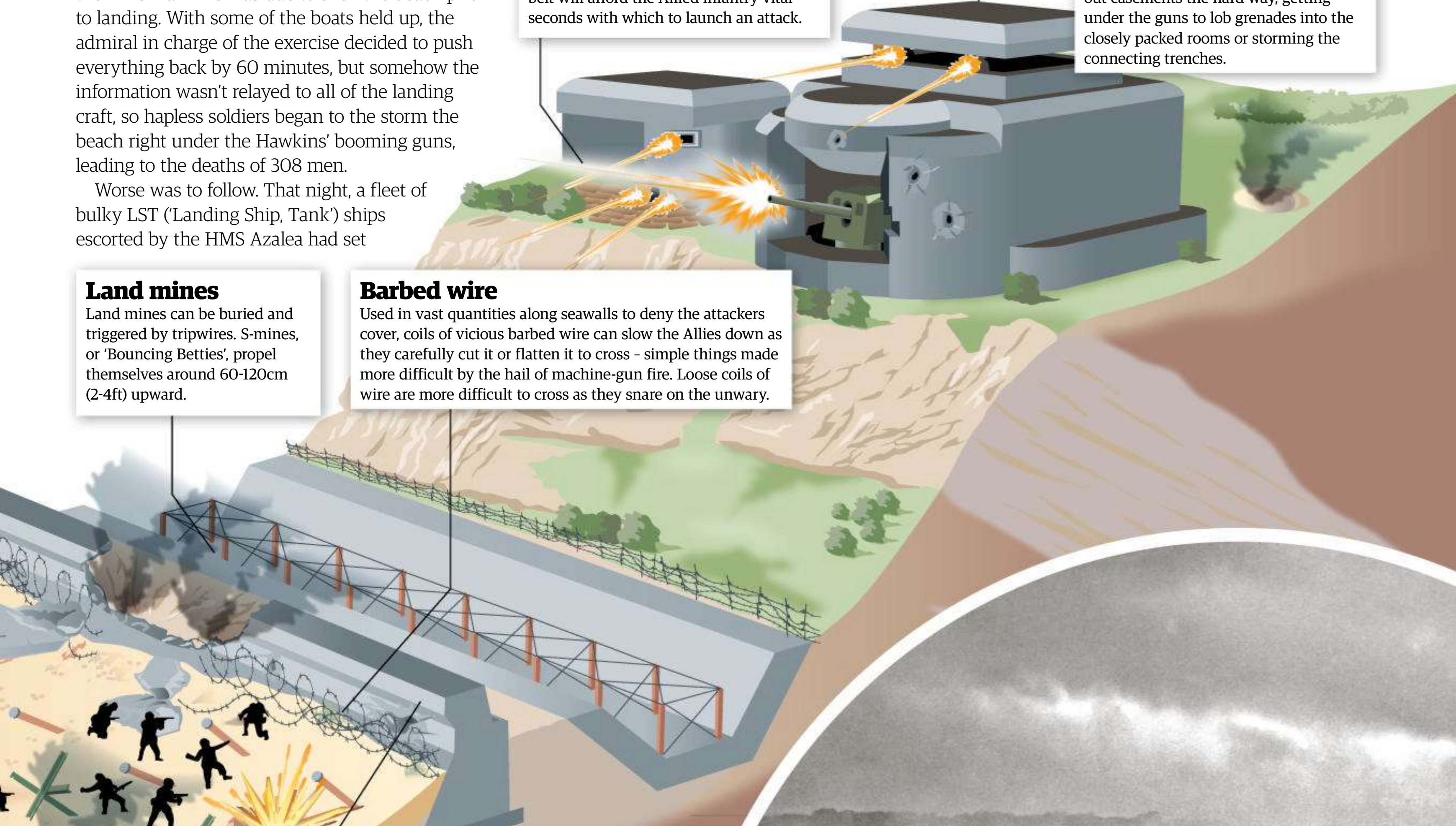
Higgins boats
Flat-bottomed Higgins boats, or LCVPs (Landing Craft, Vehicle, Personnel) carry light vehicles or up to 100 men into the shallow water before lowering their ramps, their two .30-calibre machine guns blasting covering fire as the infantry disembark. Once the beach is secure, prefab Mulburry harbours will be assembled by engineers and larger LST (Landing Ship, Tank) will follow with heavier vehicles and equipment.

Hedgehogs
Jagged balls of crossed rails make landing at high tide impossible lest the landing craft get snagged and tear a hole in the hull and slow down tanks. First used on the Czechoslovak border to deter German tanks, they're sometimes called 'Czech Hedgehogs'.

played by the Royal Navy. For the first few days the emphasis was on embarkation, as officers corralled their charges in and out of transport boats, then on 28 April the first full assault began.

Eisenhower had ordered that live ammunition be used in order to get the troops familiar with the sights and sounds of bombardment, and so the HMS Hawkins was due to shell the beach prior to landing. With some of the boats held up, the admiral in charge of the exercise decided to push everything back by 60 minutes, but somehow the information wasn't relayed to all of the landing craft, so hapless soldiers began to the storm the beach right under the Hawkins' booming guns, leading to the deaths of 308 men.

Worse was to follow. That night, a fleet of bulky LST ('Landing Ship, Tank') ships escorted by the HMS Azalea had set



Machine-gun nest

Connected to the bunkers and pillboxes by trenches, machine-gun nests guard the trails off the beach, pinning down the attackers from their superior position with suppressing fire from the infamous MG42. Though vulnerable to bombardment by the Allies, only changing the ammo belt will afford the Allied infantry vital seconds with which to launch an attack.

Artillery casement

Safely encased in thick concrete, German artillery positions shell Allied ships approaching the beach. Taking them out prior to landing is a crucial part of the early bombardment from sea or air, as not even light tanks have the firepower to dent their shell. Infantry have to take out casements the hard way, getting under the guns to lob grenades into the closely packed rooms or storming the connecting trenches.

Land mines

Land mines can be buried and triggered by tripwires. S-mines, or 'Bouncing Betties', propel themselves around 60-120cm (2-4ft) upward.

Barbed wire

Used in vast quantities along seawalls to deny the attackers cover, coils of vicious barbed wire can slow the Allies down as they carefully cut it or flatten it to cross – simple things made more difficult by the hail of machine-gun fire. Loose coils of wire are more difficult to cross as they snare on the unwary.

Seawall

The 3m (9.8ft) concrete seawall is as much protection against coastal erosion and unseasonably high tides as it is Allied assault, but it can make exiting the beach difficult for infantry and impossible for vehicles. However, it does provide the attackers with rare shelter from the German guns.

FIELD MARSHAL BERNARD MONTGOMERY

British, 1887-1976

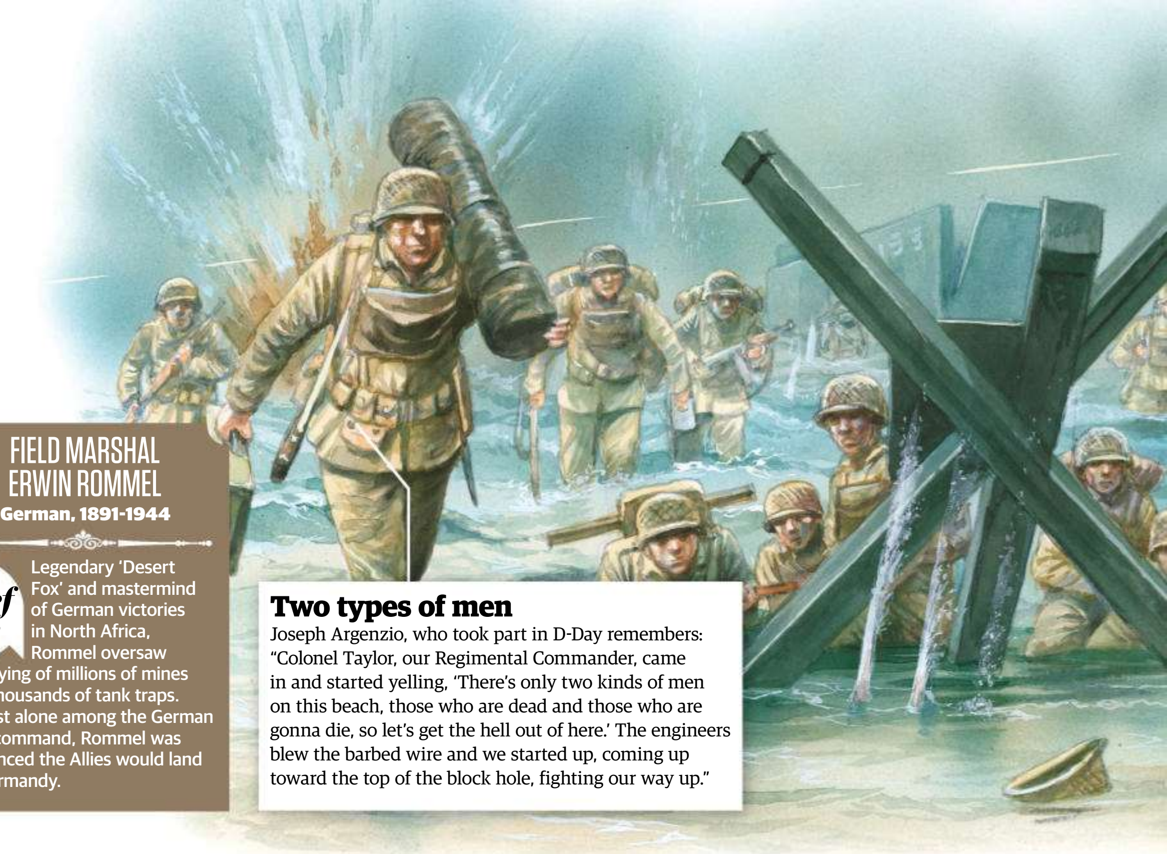
Brief Bio

Commander of Allied ground forces during Operation Overlord, it was Rommel's rival, Field Marshal Montgomery, who put Eisenhower's plans for D-Day into action. He was heavily criticised by American generals for his failure to capture Caen, the largest city in Normandy.

off from Plymouth to Slapton Sands to simulate a channel crossing. Like ducks, the HMS Azalea led the eight landing craft in single-file across Lyme Bay, when out of the darkness vicious German E-boats – souped-up fast attack craft that prowled the English Channel – opened fire with their torpedoes. Out on a routine patrol, they had been lured toward Lyme Bay by the unusually high British radio traffic. Unwilling to expose just how well defended the bay was and risk the Nazis finding out why it was so closely guarded, the shore batteries remained silent while the HMS Azalea tried to fight them off alone, leading to two landing craft being sunk while two were severely damaged. Unaware of the dangers – the HMS Azalea's crew had no idea the US officers on the LSTs were on a different radio frequency – they were ill-prepared, lifeboats were slow to launch and panicked soldiers put their life jackets on incorrectly, the weight of their packs flipping many over in the water where they drowned face down.

Records show that 198 sailors and 551 soldiers died, but until the bodies could be recovered there were serious fears that officers with intimate knowledge of D-Day had been captured and would divulge the whole plan under the harsh glare of the German interrogation lamps. Operation Overlord hadn't been fatally compromised though, as the officers kept quiet and radio codes were standardised as a result.

Though Hitler and his generals remained convinced that an assault was most likely to come from Calais, where they had concentrated their heavy defences, the 'Desert Fox', Field Marshal Erwin Rommel, who had been sent to France in early 1944 to beef up the defences, saw the vulnerability of Normandy. To the alarm of Allied military planners, who had put together an



FIELD MARSHAL ERWIN ROMMEL

German, 1891-1944

Brief Bio

Legendary 'Desert Fox' and mastermind of German victories in North Africa, Rommel oversaw the laying of millions of mines and thousands of tank traps. Almost alone among the German high command, Rommel was convinced the Allies would land at Normandy.

Two types of men

Joseph Argenzio, who took part in D-Day remembers: "Colonel Taylor, our Regimental Commander, came in and started yelling, 'There's only two kinds of men on this beach, those who are dead and those who are gonna die, so let's get the hell out of here.' The engineers blew the barbed wire and we started up, coming up toward the top of the block hole, fighting our way up."

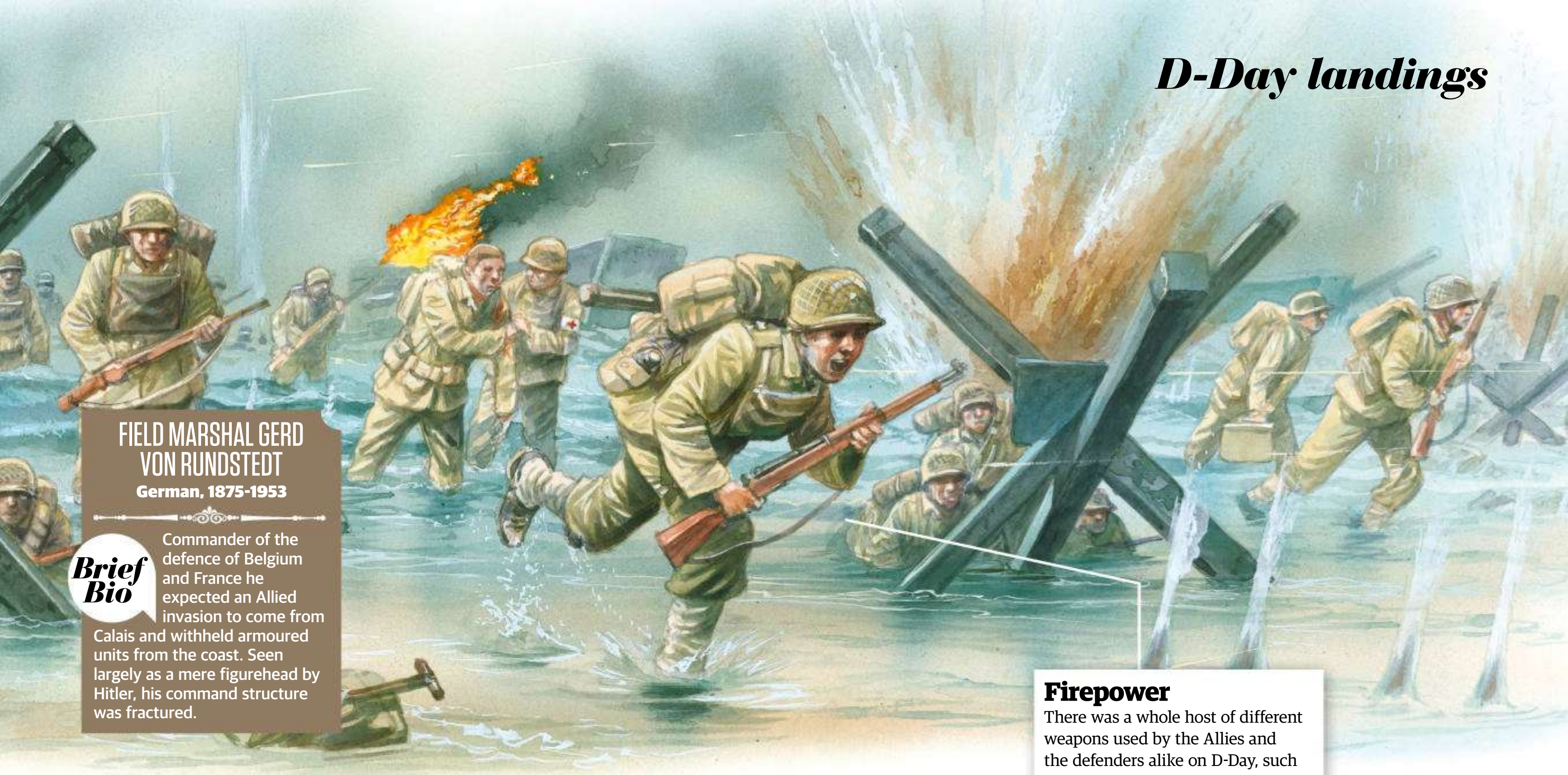
> "He went from group to group and shook hands with as many men as he could. He spoke a few words to every man as he shook his hand"

FOOLING HITLER

Operation Bodyguard was the umbrella term for an elaborate, multi-pronged deception campaign that involved all branches of the armed forces and risked MI5's most valuable double agents.

Inflatable tanks and planes in the Kent fields fooled German reconnaissance planes into thinking that Allies would dash across the channel to Calais, as well as bombing raids to soften up a target that would never be hit, while a network of 'trusted' German agents secretly working for British intelligence kept up a misleading flow of information. Intelligence from double agents highlighted a planned invasion of the French Bay of Biscay, another fake army and convenient radio intercepts in Egypt teased a planned invasion via Crete and the Balkans. Right up to D-Day itself Hitler and much of the German high command believed Normandy was a diversion – helped by an air-drop of dummies over fields around Calais. Sacks stuffed with straw and packages to simulate the sound of gunfire held divisions of Nazi troops on high alert, north of the real invasion.

General Eisenhower talks to paratroopers in England before D-Day



FIELD MARSHAL GERD VON RUNDSTEDT

German, 1875-1953

Brief Bio

Commander of the defence of Belgium and France he expected an Allied invasion to come from Calais and withheld armoured units from the coast. Seen largely as a mere figurehead by Hitler, his command structure was fractured.

Firepower

There was a whole host of different weapons used by the Allies and the defenders alike on D-Day, such as the rifle pictured. Anti-tank weapons, flamethrowers, grenades, shotguns and machine guns were also used on the beaches.

amazingly detailed mosaic of aerial photographs, coupled with intercepted traffic from Bletchley Park's crack codebreakers, and information on the ground from the French Resistance - the most recent images showed that holes were been dug in fields that had been nominated for glider landings. These holes would be filled with stakes and they'd be wired up to mines, turning the whole landing area into a web of explosive death that would ignite as soon as one wheel touched down, thanks to Rommel's military know-how.

More mines and barbwire were laid on the beaches, trenches were dug and low-lying fields were flooded to prevent aircraft landing. It was clear that the window for a successful operation was not only closing quickly, but might have already slammed shut. The weather too turned against the Allies and they were forced to hold off, on the advice of the RAF's meteorological experts, for 6 June, where the full moon would give pilots maximum visibility and the low tide would allow the Allies to land their troops well away from Rommel's new killing ground. If they didn't take this shot, the next available opportunity would be weeks away, but with a storm on the horizon and the growing German preparedness, it could be much too late.

Meanwhile in occupied France, German meteorologists had also foreseen a storm, but were so confident that it would hit the French coast much earlier that Rommel returned to Germany for his wife's birthday and to meet with Hitler to plead for more tanks. The Führer believed strongly in the doctrine of 'defence in depth' - holding back his army's strongest units further inland to mount a counterattack, while Rommel and a handful of others believed that the best course of action was to drive their enemy back from the coastline.

GERMAN DEFENCES

Fortress

Weapons: Connected to smaller pillboxes by trenches or concrete tunnels, they could boast a huge array of artillery and machine guns, as well as firing positions for infantry.
Strength: Fortified networks of concrete and steel, they were impervious to tank and light artillery. Often manned by the Waffen SS rather than regular Wehrmacht soldiers, defenders would often fight to the last man.
Weakness: Being positioned to defend French ports left them exposed.

Pillbox

Weapons: Most often used for machine guns, but they could also be designed for anti-tank guns or mortars, while firing slots existed for infantry riflemen.
Strength: Encased in concrete and steel, they were the infantry's worst nightmare – impervious to small artillery and tank fire.
Weakness: Confined spaces made them vulnerable to flame throwers, satchel charges and grenades lobbed through the firing slots.

Minefield

Weapons: Usually mixed anti-tank 'T-mines' and anti-personnel 'S-mines' (also known as the 'Bouncing Betty', they would shoot into the air, spraying shrapnel), many attached to tripwires or concrete anti-tank barriers.
Strength: Aside from the sheer devastation caused, the threat of mines could slow advance and leave attackers demoralised.
Weakness: The shifting sands could often move or bury mines even deeper, and they couldn't be relied upon to detonate.

D-DATA

300 planes bombed the coast of Normandy

5,000 ships transporting soldiers

150,000 MEN

6 parachute regiments

13,000 paratroopers

20,000 tons of supplies dropped daily

50,000 tons of gasoline in first month

30,000 vehicles used in the operation

800 transport planes

10,000 German losses on 6 June

448,000 tons of ammunition

The Desert Fox knew from his campaigns in North Africa and Italy that once the Allies gained a toehold, their victory was almost certain.

Feverish preparation and anxiety dominated the morning of 5 June 1944. On airfields across England men painted out the markings on transport planes, while over the choppy English Channel, Royal Navy mine-sweepers frantically cleared the path. At 10pm, while the paratroopers of the 101st Airborne sat waiting by their planes at Greenham Common airfield, Eisenhower paid an impromptu visit. "They looked so young and brave", recalled his driver Kay Summersby. "I stood by the car and watched as the general walked among them… He went from group to group and shook hands with as many men as he could. He spoke a few words to every man as he shook his hand and wished him success." He later confessed "it's very hard to look a soldier in the eye when you fear that you are sending him to his death."

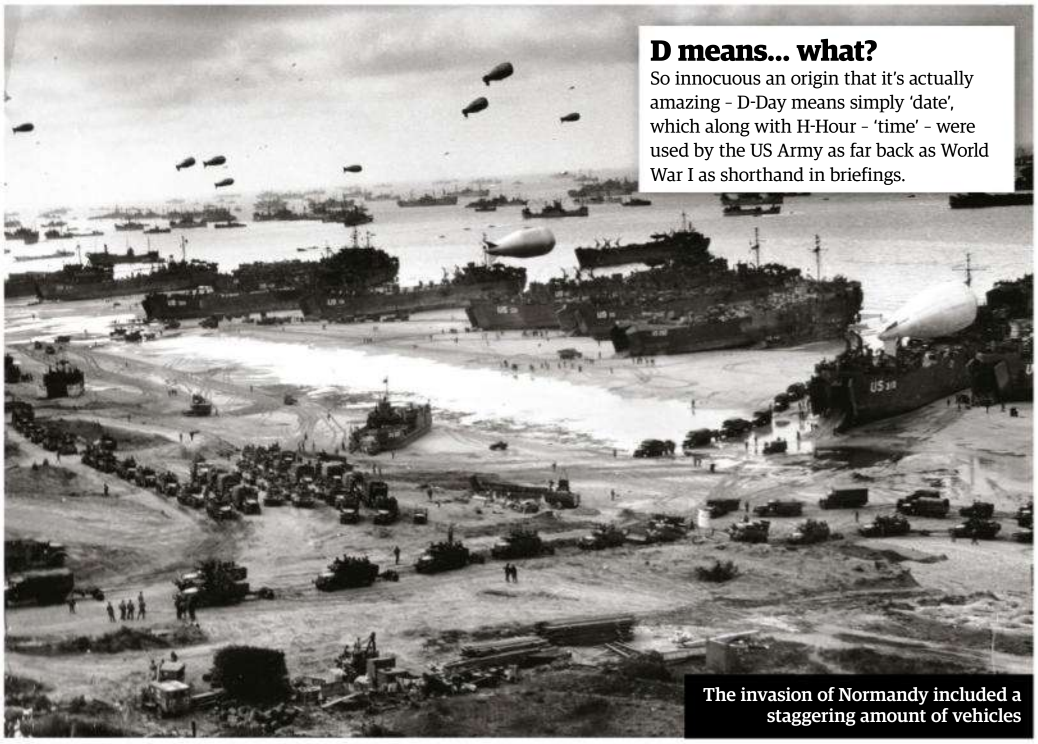
While Eisenhower dashed from runway to runway, Sir Alan Brooke put his fears in his diary, that "it may well be the most ghastly disaster of the whole war. I wish to God it were safely over."

Somewhere around 6am, rifles barked death in the grey light as the men of the 101st Airborne battled on through the morning. With his comrades scattered across the fields, he had joined an ad hoc unit, full of men he barely recognised – every few minutes, rustling in the undergrowth would precede an urgent whisper of "Flash!" and the reply, "Thunder!", and more paratroopers would join their band. It didn't matter that the officer leading them wasn't his or that he'd twisted his ankle in the drop, they had secured their objective. The beach exits were safe and the army landing at Utah could concentrate on the enemy in front of them, not the enemy around the corner.

The soldier hadn't noticed the water turn to sand as the 8th Infantry collided with Utah Beach, but he knew when to stop running. His lungs raw and his breathing heavy, he crouched at the foot of the incline – with the machine-gun nests silenced it was a sanctuary. Bodies floated in the water or lay face down in the sand behind him, but already units were forming as officers barked orders, checking their weapons and moving them on up and over the sand. Some lit cigarettes, others joked with nervous relief. There were other battles to fight. He exhaled slowly, hefted his pack and started moving forward.

Hours later and a world away, Winston Churchill stepped up to the dispatch box, the Commons roaring in approval. His features softened, a slight smile dancing at the corner of his mouth. Away from the behind-the-scenes tussles for control, of the set-backs and the catastrophes, and of the gut-wrenching dread of the night before, this old warhorse was finally back on the battlefield. "I have also to announce to the House", he rumbled, growing with every vowel, "that during the night and the early hours of this morning the first of the series of landings in force upon the European continent has taken place…"

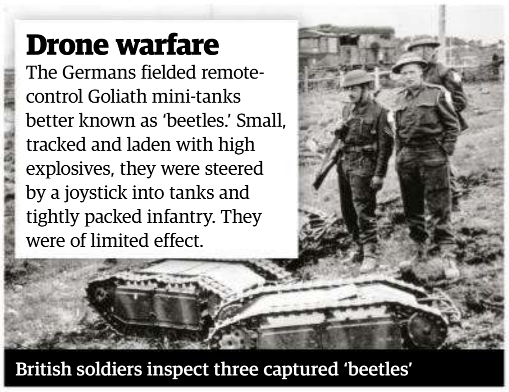
15 THINGS YOU DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT D-DAY



D means… what?

So innocuous an origin that it's actually amazing – D-Day means simply 'date', which along with H-Hour – 'time' – were used by the US Army as far back as World War I as shorthand in briefings.

The invasion of Normandy included a staggering amount of vehicles



Drone warfare

The Germans fielded remote-control Goliath mini-tanks better known as 'beetles.' Small, tracked and laden with high explosives, they were steered by a joystick into tanks and tightly packed infantry. They were of limited effect.

British soldiers inspect three captured 'beetles'

Friends in the air

Although most concerned with the Pacific War in 1944, the Royal Australian Air Force and Royal New Zealand Air Force provided air support for the D-Day landings.

An Australian Spitfire at RAF Redhill in Surrey, returned from a raid over Northern France

The other allies

One regiment of Free French and one of Polish Armed Forces In The West took part in the Battle of Normandy.

Members of a Polish tank regiment scan the horizon

A Russian Cossack volunteer in German Army uniform, not unlike those who fought at Normandy

The other axis

German troops weren't alone in defending Normandy on D-Day either. The Wehrmacht's 709th and 243rd Static Infantry Division was comprised of former Soviet POWs, as well as conscripts and volunteers from Poland and Georgia.

D-Day wasn't the end

After D-Day, the Battle of Normandy lasted another two months, with Paris finally falling to the Allies in August 1944. Operation Overlord wasn't just confined to the beaches, it was the plan for the complete liberation of France.

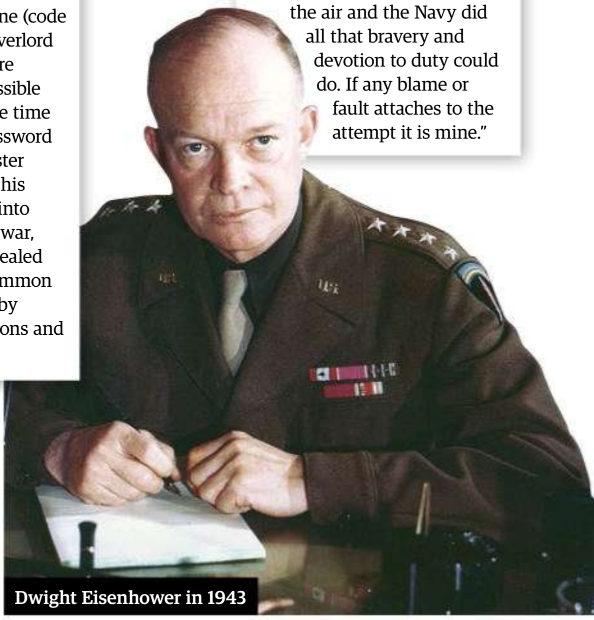
Free French tanks lead the Allies through the Arc du Triomphe on 26 August 1944

Crossword conspiracy?

A series of Daily Telegraph crossword answers – Juno, Sword, Gold, Omaha, Mulberry (code for the prefab harbours), Neptune (code for the naval assault) and Overlord – in the run-up to D-Day were investigated by MI5 as a possible security leak. Believed at the time to be a coincidence, the crossword was compiled by a headmaster who would invite boys into his study to write down words into the grid. Speaking after the war, two of his former pupils revealed that the codewords were common knowledge around the nearby army camp – only the locations and timings were unknown.

Eisenhower prepares for failure

Eisenhower had prepared a speech that he would give along with his resignation if D-Day failed: "The troops, the air and the Navy did all that bravery and devotion to duty could do. If any blame or fault attaches to the attempt it is mine."



Dwight Eisenhower in 1943

A German U-boat earlier in WWII

Hitler's kamikaze U-boat captains

As D-Day began, Hitler ordered U-Boat captains to proceed to Normandy and fire their torpedoes before ramming into Allied battleships. No U-Boats were close enough to carry out this suicide mission.

One man could have ruined it all

One of MI5's double agents involved in the Operation Bodyguard deception knew the whole thing was a ruse. On 29 April 1944, the German-born Johnny Jebsen – codename Artist – was kidnapped from Portugal and taken to Berlin where he was tortured in the Gestapo headquarters, before being sent to a concentration camp (his arrival was registered along with his broken ribs), from where he simply disappeared. He took the secret of D-Day to his grave.

A member of the French resistance with a US soldier in 1944

Sending the prisoners to Texas

From D-Day through to the Battle of Normandy, the US Army sent 30,000 prisoners a month to POW camps in Texas – the largest concentration of German POWs in the US.

The French Resistance went all out

In the run-up to D-Day the French Resistance delivered 3,000 written reports and 700 radio reports on German defences in Normandy, and the night before D-Day they launched an attack, cutting phone lines, blowing up ammo dumps, assassinating senior Nazi officers and disabling German trains. As a result, German reinforcements were held up.

Sir Alec Guinness, pictured in 1973

Midget subs led the way

The Allies used two X-class four-man submarines to mark the outer limits of Sword and Juno Beaches. They arrived on 4 June and stayed submerged until 4.30 am on D-Day, where they used masts with lights to guide the British vessels in.

Famous faces on the beaches

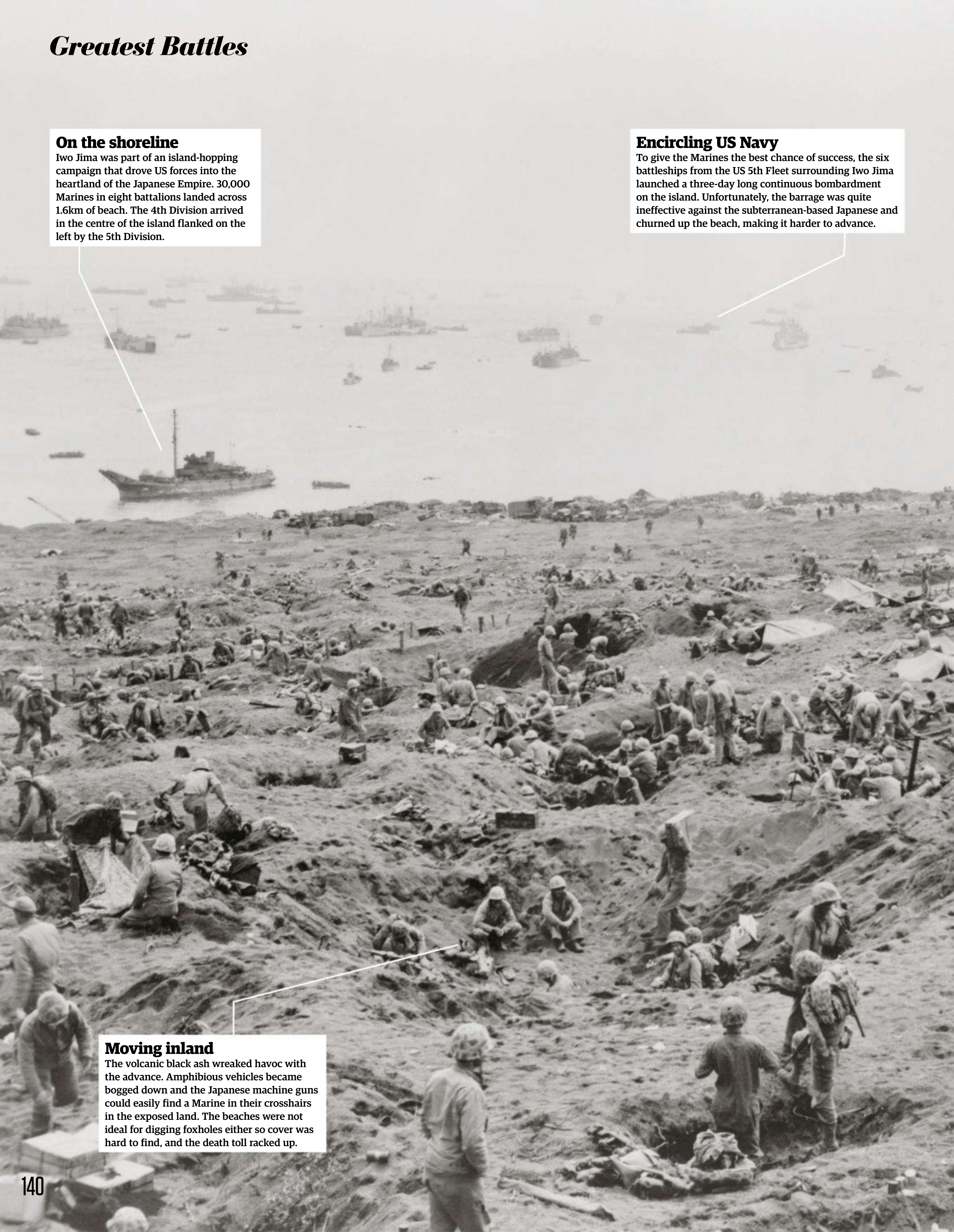
The Catcher In The Rye author JD Salinger fought at D-Day in the US Signal Corps; *Star Wars* and *The Bridge On The River Kwai* actor Alec Guinness was a seaman on a D-Day landing craft; while *Star Trek* actor James Doohan was an officer in the Canadian Army and was among the first to storm Juno Beach.

From the bayou to the beaches

The flat-bottomed landing crafts used in D-Day were invented by New Orleans buisnessman Andrew Higgins for navigating the Louisiana swamps. Eisenhower described him as "the man who won the war for us", and even Hitler dubbed him the "new Noah."

US troops disembark from a Higgins boat

© Ian Moores Graphics, Thinkstock



On the shoreline

Iwo Jima was part of an island-hopping campaign that drove US forces into the heartland of the Japanese Empire. 30,000 Marines in eight battalions landed across 1.6km of beach. The 4th Division arrived in the centre of the island flanked on the left by the 5th Division.

Encircling US Navy

To give the Marines the best chance of success, the six battleships from the US 5th Fleet surrounding Iwo Jima launched a three-day long continuous bombardment on the island. Unfortunately, the barrage was quite ineffective against the subterranean-based Japanese and churned up the beach, making it harder to advance.

Moving inland

The volcanic black ash wreaked havoc with the advance. Amphibious vehicles became bogged down and the Japanese machine guns could easily find a Marine in their crosshairs in the exposed land. The beaches were not ideal for digging foxholes either so cover was hard to find, and the death toll racked up.

Death toll
Although Iwo Jima wasn't a disastrous victory for the USA, it was still a bloody engagement. 6,821 Marines were killed with a further 18,000 wounded. The Japanese fared even worse and lost almost the entire garrison of the island.

Kuribayashi's strategy
The Japanese knew the Americans were coming, but with an island so small, a dogged defence of Iwo Jima was the only strategic option. Snipers were dotted all over the island and the home advantage allowed the Imperial Army to conceal and entrench themselves.

BATTLE OF IWO JIMA

IWO JIMA 19 FEBRUARY – 26 MARCH 1945

While Hitler was preparing his futile final offences of the war in Europe, the US Army had assaults of its own to undertake in East Asia. Located 1,220 kilometres south of Tokyo was the remote volcanic island of Iwo Jima, just 21 square kilometres in size. On it were two airfields essential to American plans for the War in the Pacific. B-29 Superfortresses had been incredibly effective in their bombing of areas under Japanese occupation, and the capture of Iwo Jima would allow fighter escorts to accompany the bombing runs, making them an even more formidable threat. The Japanese Imperial Army knew of the importance of the island and had fortified Iwo Jima with a network of subterranean tunnels and 642 pillboxes. This didn't deter the US forces, and battle commenced on 19 February after 72 days of intense bombing on the island.

At 8.59am, the 4th and 5th US Marine Divisions stormed the black-sand beaches to find the artillery barrage had not done its job. Attacks came thick and fast from machine-gun and mortar nests embedded into the island's thick rock. The beaches soon became a mess of twisted metal and burning vehicles, and the Marines launched themselves into shallow foxholes to avoid the crossfire. 2,500 died in what would become the bloodiest day in the history of the US Marine corps, but the tide soon turned when the west coast of the island was reached by nightfall. Combat raged on the volcanic island for days as the Japanese tunnel system became the Marines' nemesis. The Americans only took a few hundred metres of ground every day, and whenever a fortified position was taken, the Japanese soldiers used the underground caverns to attack from another angle. The navy was also kept on its toes by kamikaze attacks, which were so devastating that on 21 February, USS Bismarck was sunk, killing 318.

The southern tip of the island was dominated by Mount Suribachi and the invaders managed to claim it on 23 February. The American flag was raised on the summit in what would become an iconic image of the war. As the day progressed, the 4th and 5th Divisions were boosted by the entry of the 3rd Division into the fray. Now, the total number of US Marines who had been engaged in battle numbered 70,000 as the defenders became hideously outnumbered. After weeks of ferocious fighting, by the night of 25 March, only 300 Japanese soldiers remained. With no other alternative, led by Kuribayashi, they resorted to a banzai charge. The valiant yet suicidal attack was completely wiped out and the fight for Iwo Jima was over.

The bloody Operation Detachment came to an official end the next day but fighters had already been making sorties from 11 March. One in three US Marines were killed or wounded but the death toll paled in comparison to the Japanese, who lost over 20,000 men. 27 Medal of Honors were awarded, and the Battle of Okinawa loomed into view, getting under way just four days later. The ferocity of the defence of Iwo Jima surprised the American generals and would later help influence the decision to use atomic weaponry on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

3rd, 4th & 5th Marines

TROOPS 110,000
SHIPS 880

GENERAL HOLLAND 'HOWLING MAD' SMITH

LEADER

Considered the father of US amphibious warfare, he was a veteran of World War I.

Strengths Experience and pushed for the use of advanced weaponry.

Weakness Along with many others, he believed the invasion would take just four days.

ZIPPO M4A3 SHERMAN

UNIT

These modified Sherman M4A3 tanks were armed with flamethrowers with a range of 150m and a firing duration of 60 seconds.

Strengths Effective at flushing out Japanese tunnels.

Weakness Only eight Shermans were equipped with the Mark I flamethrower.

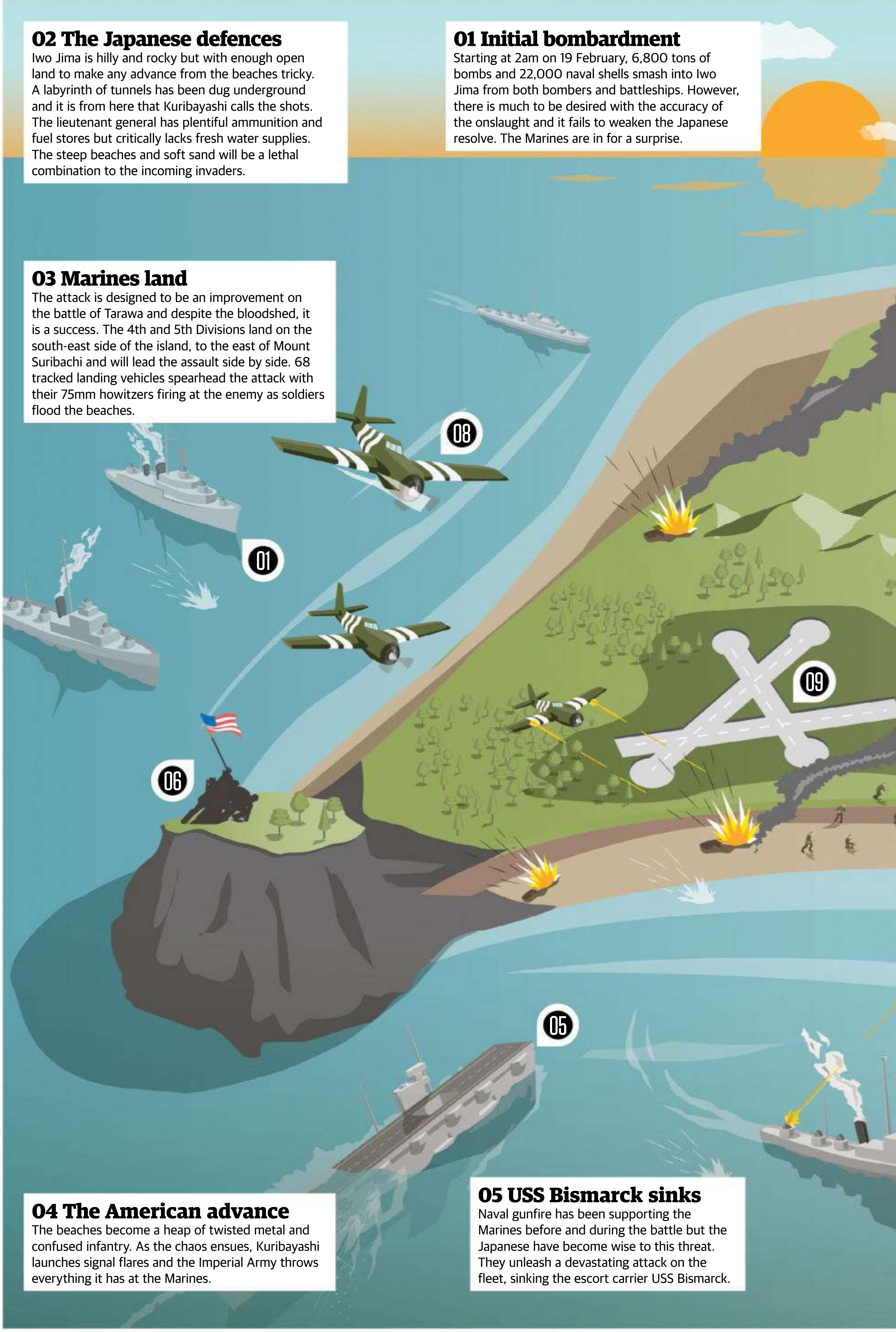
FLAMETHROWER

KEY WEAPON

A portable backpack that contained a lethal concoction of gasoline and napalm ready to be set on fire.

Strengths The raging inferno could wipe out scores of infantry.

Weakness Danger of flammable explosive fuel on the soldiers' backs.



01 Initial bombardment

Starting at 2am on 19 February, 6,800 tons of bombs and 22,000 naval shells smash into Iwo Jima from both bombers and battleships. However, there is much to be desired with the accuracy of the onslaught and it fails to weaken the Japanese resolve. The Marines are in for a surprise.

02 The Japanese defences

Iwo Jima is hilly and rocky but with enough open land to make any advance from the beaches tricky. A labyrinth of tunnels has been dug underground and it is from here that Kuribayashi calls the shots. The lieutenant general has plentiful ammunition and fuel stores but critically lacks fresh water supplies. The steep beaches and soft sand will be a lethal combination to the incoming invaders.

03 Marines land

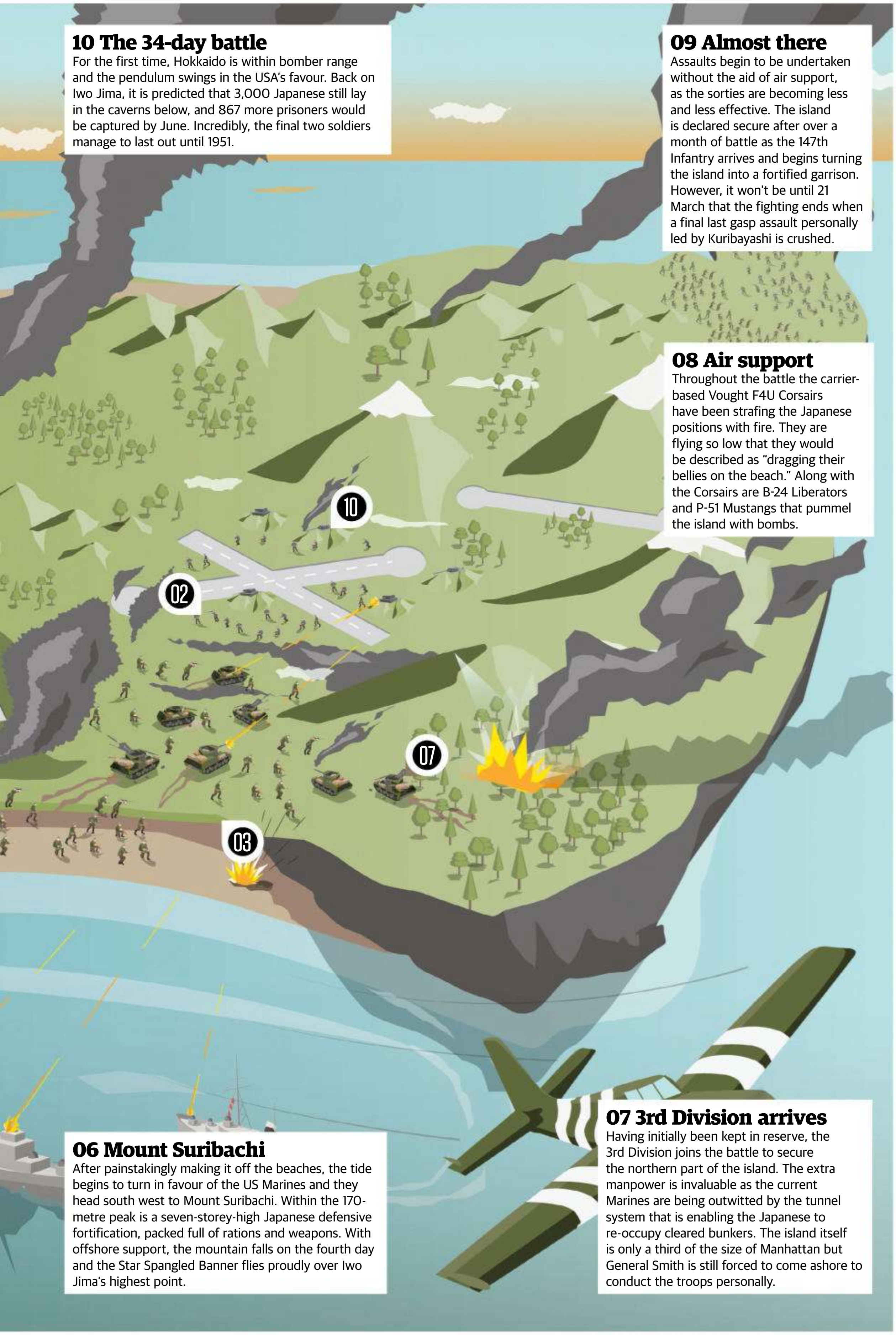
The attack is designed to be an improvement on the battle of Tarawa and despite the bloodshed, it is a success. The 4th and 5th Divisions land on the south-east side of the island, to the east of Mount Suribachi and will lead the assault side by side. 68 tracked landing vehicles spearhead the attack with their 75mm howitzers firing at the enemy as soldiers flood the beaches.

04 The American advance

The beaches become a heap of twisted metal and confused infantry. As the chaos ensues, Kuribayashi launches signal flares and the Imperial Army throws everything it has at the Marines.

05 USS Bismarck sinks

Naval gunfire has been supporting the Marines before and during the battle but the Japanese have become wise to this threat. They unleash a devastating attack on the fleet, sinking the escort carrier USS Bismarck.



06 Mount Suribachi

After painstakingly making it off the beaches, the tide begins to turn in favour of the US Marines and they head south west to Mount Suribachi. Within the 170-metre peak is a seven-storey-high Japanese defensive fortification, packed full of rations and weapons. With offshore support, the mountain falls on the fourth day and the Star Spangled Banner flies proudly over Iwo Jima's highest point.

07 3rd Division arrives

Having initially been kept in reserve, the 3rd Division joins the battle to secure the northern part of the island. The extra manpower is invaluable as the current Marines are being outwitted by the tunnel system that is enabling the Japanese to re-occupy cleared bunkers. The island itself is only a third of the size of Manhattan but General Smith is still forced to come ashore to conduct the troops personally.

08 Air support

Throughout the battle the carrier-based Vought F4U Corsairs have been strafing the Japanese positions with fire. They are flying so low that they would be described as "dragging their bellies on the beach." Along with the Corsairs are B-24 Liberators and P-51 Mustangs that pummel the island with bombs.

09 Almost there

Assaults begin to be undertaken without the aid of air support, as the sorties are becoming less and less effective. The island is declared secure after over a month of battle as the 147th Infantry arrives and begins turning the island into a fortified garrison. However, it won't be until 21 March that the fighting ends when a final last gasp assault personally led by Kuribayashi is crushed.

10 The 34-day battle

For the first time, Hokkaido is within bomber range and the pendulum swings in the USA's favour. Back on Iwo Jima, it is predicted that 3,000 Japanese still lay in the caverns below, and 867 more prisoners would be captured by June. Incredibly, the final two soldiers manage to last out until 1951.

109th Infantry Division

TROOPS 23,000
SHIPS 0

LIEUTENANT-GENERAL TADAMICHI KURIBAYASHI

LEADER

A former cavalry officer, Kuribayashi was an intelligent and patient leader who forbade his men to resort to banzai charges.

Strengths Got rid of the tactics that resulted in past defeats.

Weakness Departure from tradition upset his subsidiary officers.

TYPE 95 LIGHT TANK HA-GO

KEY UNIT

A small light tank used alongside the slightly larger Type 97 Chi-ha tank.

Strengths Deployed hidden in gullies for the best chance of attack.

Weakness Easily outgunned by the Shermans.

320MM 'SPIGOT' MORTARS

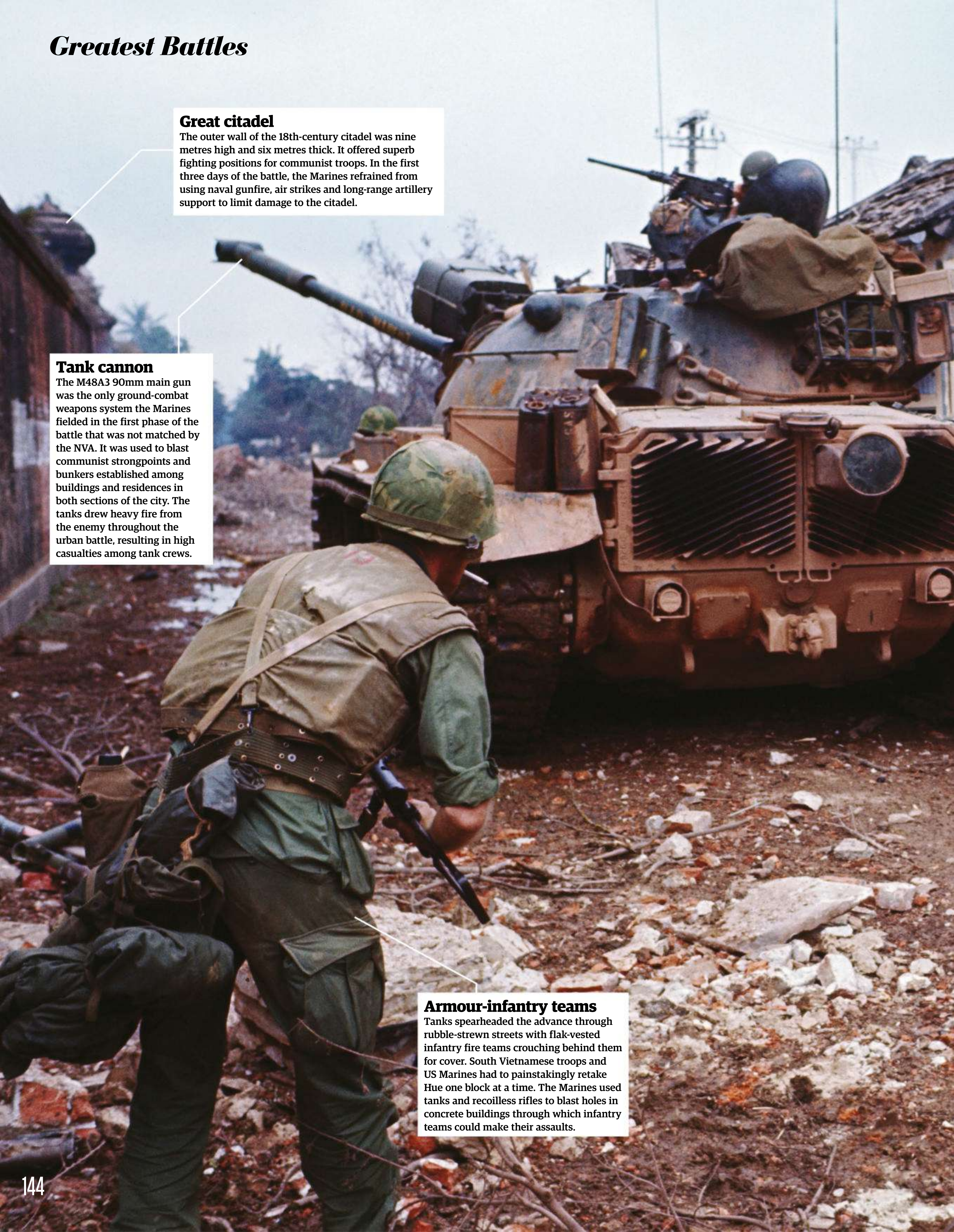
KEY WEAPON

Huge mortars that were new to the battlefield struck fear into the heart of the Marines.

Strengths The huge projectiles could cause devastation in a foxhole.

Weakness Inaccurate and had more of a psychological effect.

© Alamy



Great citadel

The outer wall of the 18th-century citadel was nine metres high and six metres thick. It offered superb fighting positions for communist troops. In the first three days of the battle, the Marines refrained from using naval gunfire, air strikes and long-range artillery support to limit damage to the citadel.

Tank cannon

The M48A3 90mm main gun was the only ground-combat weapons system the Marines fielded in the first phase of the battle that was not matched by the NVA. It was used to blast communist strongpoints and bunkers established among buildings and residences in both sections of the city. The tanks drew heavy fire from the enemy throughout the urban battle, resulting in high casualties among tank crews.

Armour-infantry teams

Tanks spearheaded the advance through rubble-strewn streets with flak-vested infantry fire teams crouching behind them for cover. South Vietnamese troops and US Marines had to painstakingly retake Hue one block at a time. The Marines used tanks and recoilless rifles to blast holes in concrete buildings through which infantry teams could make their assaults.

NVA bunkers
Communist troops transformed concrete-walled buildings and homes into strongholds with crew-served weapons, such as mortars, machine guns and recoilless rifles. Communist snipers chiselled through the concrete to craft expertly concealed firing positions.

Marine assault rifle
The select-fire M16 5.56mm rifle used a 20-round magazine. It was made of steel, aluminium alloy and composite plastics that made it light in comparison to its heavier predecessor, the M-14. As a result, each infantryman was able to carry more ammunition.

BATTLE OF HUE

NORTHERN SOUTH VIETNAM

31 JANUARY 1968 – 24 FEBRUARY 1968

The dark clouds, steady drizzle and boarded-up buildings heightened the sense of foreboding as the US Marines of Corporal Glenn Lucas's point squad approached the Thuong Tu Gate to the Hue Citadel. As they drew closer, they were struck by a hailstorm of fire from soldiers of the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) in concealed positions along the fortress wall and inside the gate. Half of the men in the squad were knocked to the ground. The Marines returned fire with machine guns. Commander Captain Charles Meadows received permission to abort the mission from Lieutenant Colonel Marcus Gravel, but it would take the Marines two hours to safely pull back to the Nguyen Hoang Bridge.

Earlier that afternoon, Gravel had been ordered to lead two companies of Marines across the only remaining intact bridge over the Perfume River – which divided the city into northern and southern parts. Their objective was to link up with the beleaguered personnel from the Army of the Republic of South Vietnam (ARVN) 1st Infantry Division headquarters, trapped in the north-east corner. The following day, ARVN relief forces reached their fellow soldiers in the citadel from the north. It would be more than ten days before the Marines returned to the citadel.

The communist offensive occurred on the Vietnamese New Year holiday, Tet, to give them the element of surprise when they struck Hue, the third largest city. Aware of the overwhelming strength of the US military forces, the communists knew they would only be able to hold Hue for a short amount of time, but because it was the historical heart and soul of South Vietnam, the attack had great propaganda value.

In the early hours of 31 January, the 6th Regiment of the NVA captured the citadel on the north bank of the Perfume River, and the 4th Regiment seized the south side. Despite their impressive whirlwind attack, the communists made several key mistakes on the first day. They not only failed to overrun the ARVN headquarters unit and the Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV) compound, but they also failed to seal off Route 1 so that US Marine forces at Phu Bai Combat Base 13 kilometres away could not quickly reach the south side.

The ARVN and US Marine Corps forces began counterattacking from their respective perimeters on 4 February. On 11 February, at the request of the South Vietnamese, the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, deployed by boat and helicopter to the northern end of the citadel to assist ARVN forces in clearing the last enemy troops from the citadel.

As the battle drew to a close, ARVN forces were given the honour of retaking the Imperial Palace inside the citadel and replacing the Viet Cong banner on the main flagpole with the South Vietnamese flag. After the battle, the mass graves of 2,800 civilians executed by the Viet Cong during the occupation were discovered. For the South Vietnamese, Hue was a dark chapter in a long war.

NVA-VC Army

NVA FORCES
4 BATTALIONS
VC FORCES
6 BATTALIONS

GENERAL VO NGUYEN GIAP

LEADER

The defence minister masterminded the Tet Offensive in hopes of inciting an uprising in South Vietnam.

Strengths Struck cultural centre of Hue with overwhelming strength.

Weakness Mistakenly believed that NVA commanders were as skilled as the US commanders.

NORTH VIETNAMESE REGULARS

KEY UNIT

The North Vietnamese were well supplied in the early stage of the battle because sympathisers had stockpiled food and ammunition.

Strengths High morale and a willingness to die fighting for the reunification of Vietnam.

Weakness Suffered from deprivation and diseases, such as malaria, living in primitive conditions in the jungles of South Vietnam.

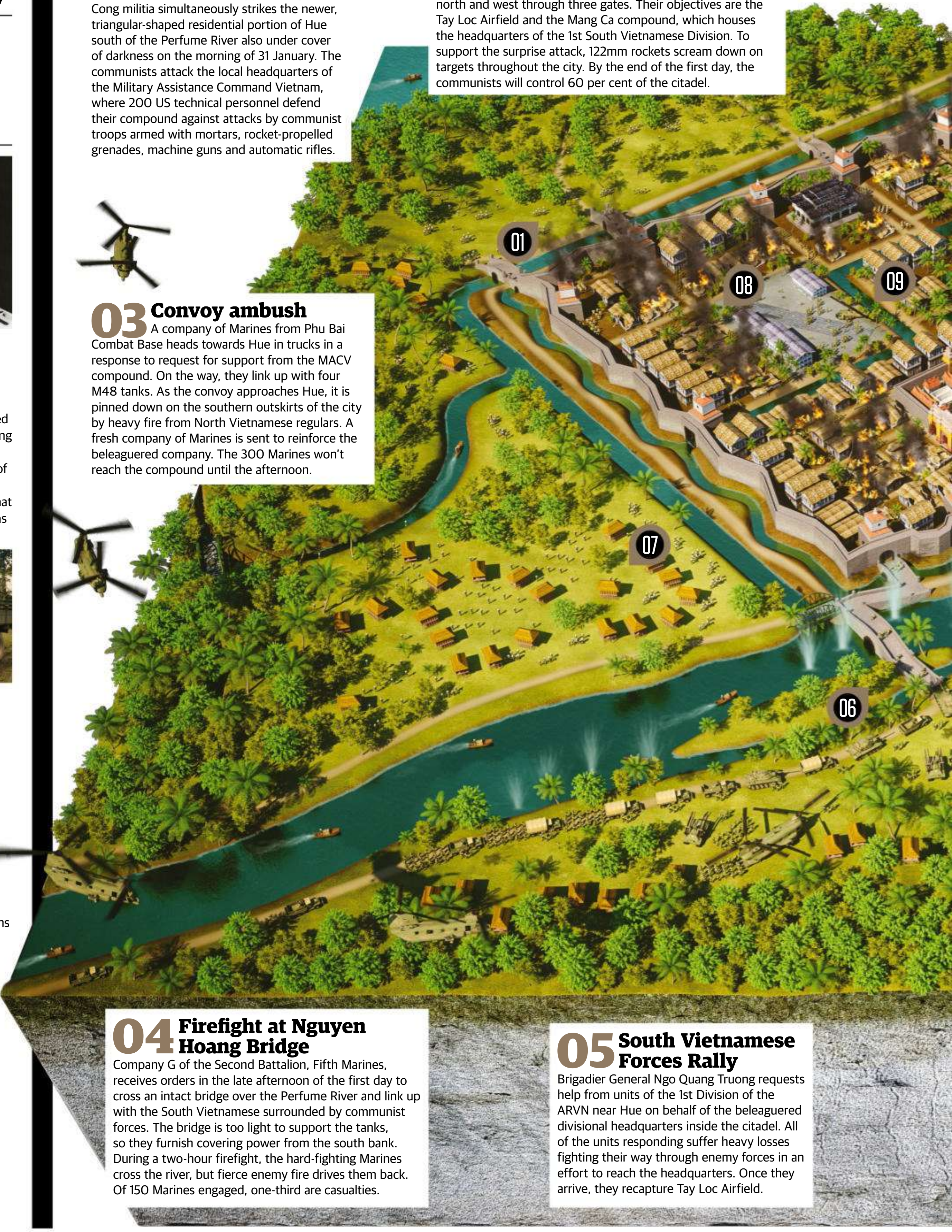
RPG-2

KEY WEAPON

The hand-held, rocket-propelled grenade launcher gave NVA and VC soldiers the ability to knock out enemy armoured vehicles and strongpoints.

Strengths Rugged and very easy to operate.

Weakness Only accurate at short distances.



01 Night assault on the citadel

At 3.30am on 31 January 1968, three battalions of North Vietnamese soldiers storm into the citadel from the north and west through three gates. Their objectives are the Tay Loc Airfield and the Mang Ca compound, which houses the headquarters of the 1st South Vietnamese Division. To support the surprise attack, 122mm rockets scream down on targets throughout the city. By the end of the first day, the communists will control 60 per cent of the citadel.

02 Attack on the south side

The 804th NVA Battalion supported by Viet Cong militia simultaneously strikes the newer, triangular-shaped residential portion of Hue south of the Perfume River also under cover of darkness on the morning of 31 January. The communists attack the local headquarters of the Military Assistance Command Vietnam, where 200 US technical personnel defend their compound against attacks by communist troops armed with mortars, rocket-propelled grenades, machine guns and automatic rifles.

03 Convoy ambush

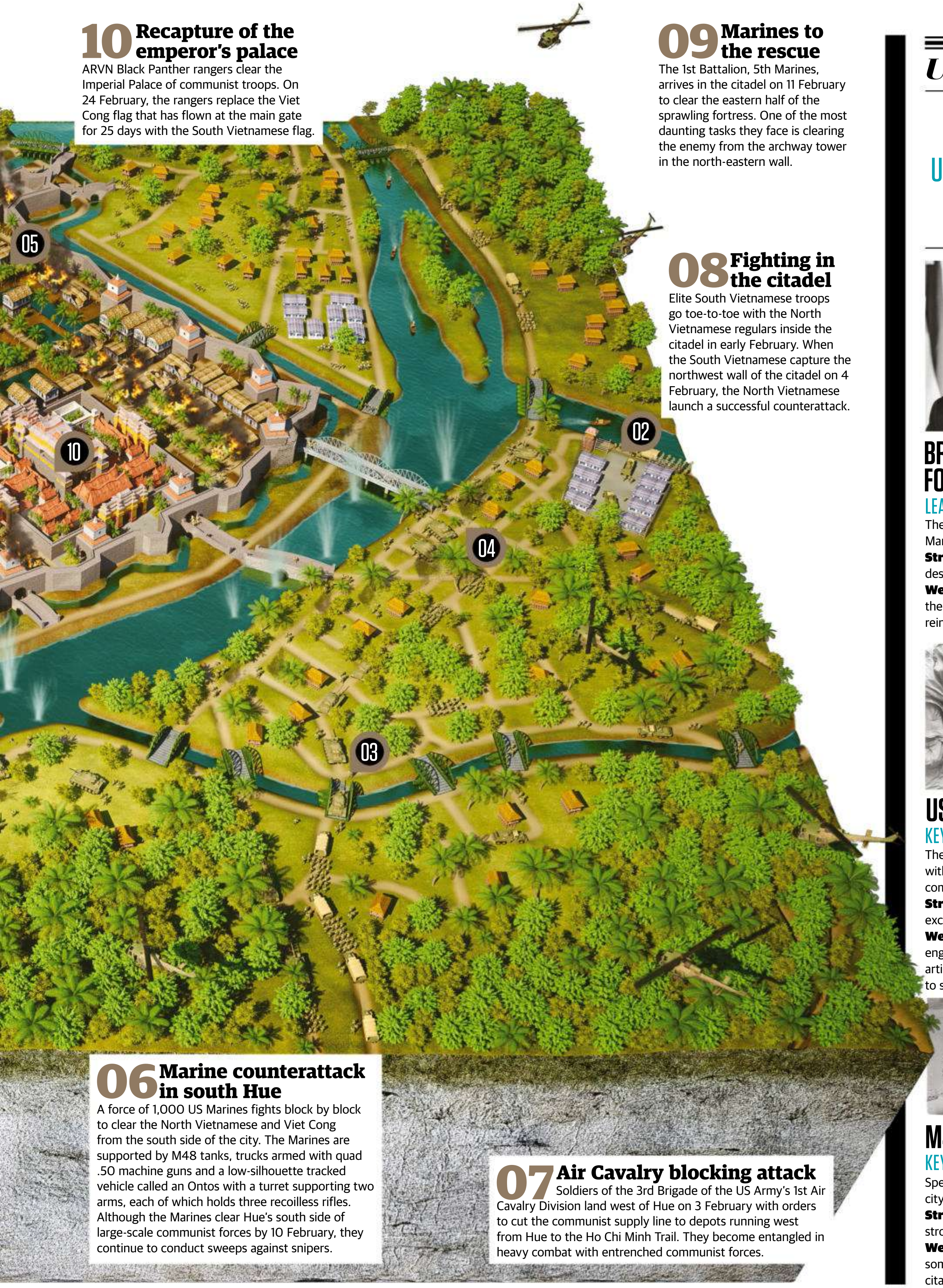
A company of Marines from Phu Bai Combat Base heads towards Hue in trucks in a response to request for support from the MACV compound. On the way, they link up with four M48 tanks. As the convoy approaches Hue, it is pinned down on the southern outskirts of the city by heavy fire from North Vietnamese regulars. A fresh company of Marines is sent to reinforce the beleaguered company. The 300 Marines won't reach the compound until the afternoon.

04 Firefight at Nguyen Hoang Bridge

Company G of the Second Battalion, Fifth Marines, receives orders in the late afternoon of the first day to cross an intact bridge over the Perfume River and link up with the South Vietnamese surrounded by communist forces. The bridge is too light to support the tanks, so they furnish covering power from the south bank. During a two-hour firefight, the hard-fighting Marines cross the river, but fierce enemy fire drives them back. Of 150 Marines engaged, one-third are casualties.

05 South Vietnamese Forces Rally

Brigadier General Ngo Quang Truong requests help from units of the 1st Division of the ARVN near Hue on behalf of the beleaguered divisional headquarters inside the citadel. All of the units responding suffer heavy losses fighting their way through enemy forces in an effort to reach the headquarters. Once they arrive, they recapture Tay Loc Airfield.



10 Recapture of the emperor's palace

ARVN Black Panther rangers clear the Imperial Palace of communist troops. On 24 February, the rangers replace the Viet Cong flag that has flown at the main gate for 25 days with the South Vietnamese flag.

09 Marines to the rescue

The 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, arrives in the citadel on 11 February to clear the eastern half of the sprawling fortress. One of the most daunting tasks they face is clearing the enemy from the archway tower in the north-eastern wall.

08 Fighting in the citadel

Elite South Vietnamese troops go toe-to-toe with the North Vietnamese regulars inside the citadel in early February. When the South Vietnamese capture the northwest wall of the citadel on 4 February, the North Vietnamese launch a successful counterattack.

06 Marine counterattack in south Hue

A force of 1,000 US Marines fights block by block to clear the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong from the south side of the city. The Marines are supported by M48 tanks, trucks armed with quad .50 machine guns and a low-silhouette tracked vehicle called an Ontos with a turret supporting two arms, each of which holds three recoilless rifles. Although the Marines clear Hue's south side of large-scale communist forces by 10 February, they continue to conduct sweeps against snipers.

07 Air Cavalry blocking attack

Soldiers of the 3rd Brigade of the US Army's 1st Air Cavalry Division land west of Hue on 3 February with orders to cut the communist supply line to depots running west from Hue to the Ho Chi Minh Trail. They become entangled in heavy combat with entrenched communist forces.

US ARVN Army

ARVN FORCES 11 BATTALIONS
US FORCES 3 MARINE BATTALIONS + 3 US ARMY BATTALIONS

BRIGADIER GENERAL FOSTER C LAHUE, USMC

LEADER

The assistant commander of the 1st Marine Division.

Strengths Pressed the attack despite stifling rules of engagement.

Weakness Underestimated the enemy threat and fed reinforcements piecemeal.

US MARINES

KEY UNIT

The US Marines were entrusted with helping defend against communist insurgency.

Strengths The elite Marines excelled at offensive operations.

Weakness Hampered by rules of engagement that initially prohibited artillery and air support in an effort to spare civilians.

M48A3 PATTON TANK

KEY WEAPON

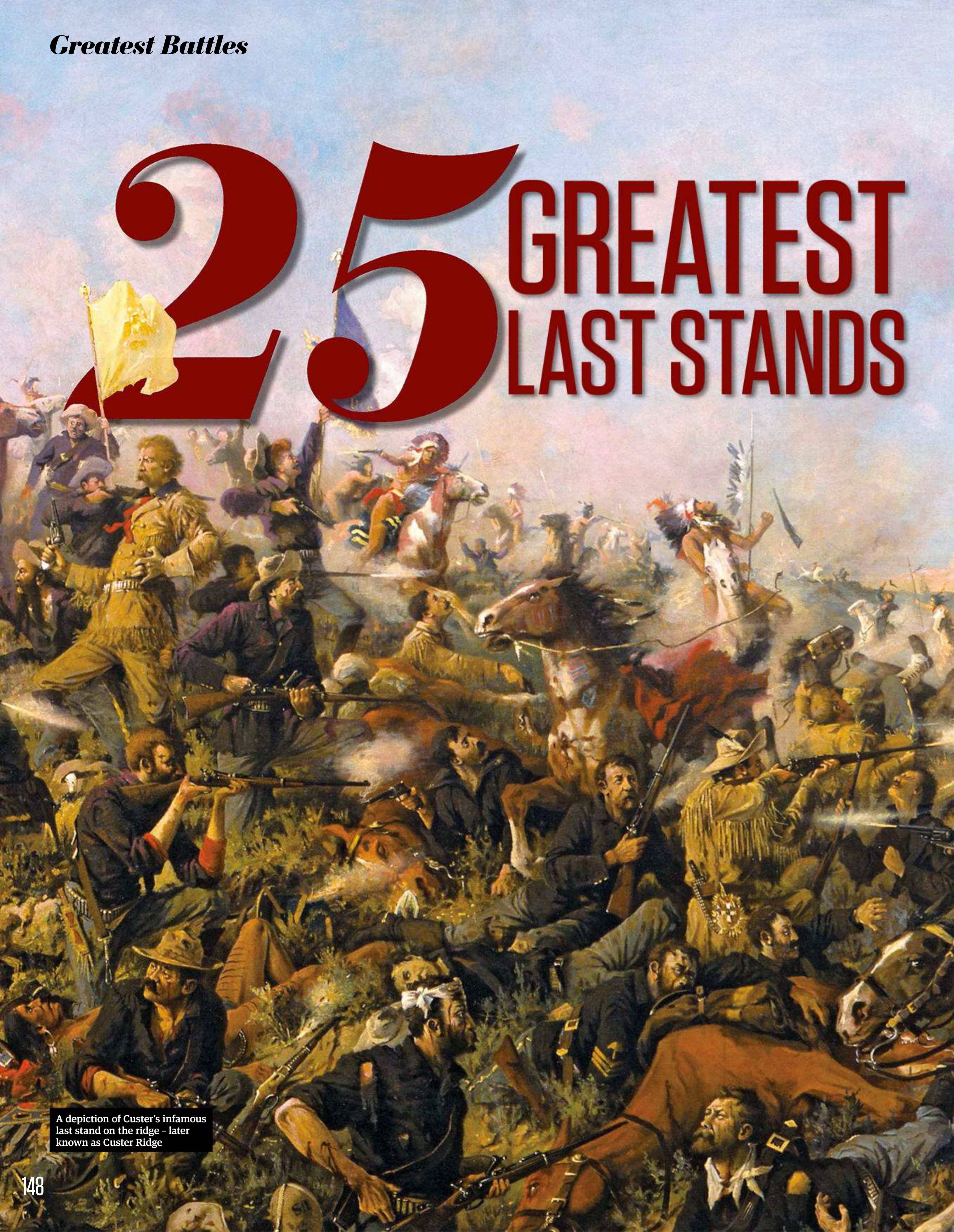
Spearheaded attacks through the city protecting infantry squads.

Strengths Capable of knocking out strongpoints with its 90mm cannon.

Weakness Unable to operate on some narrow streets inside the citadel and vulnerable to RPGs.

© Alamy, Getty Images, Nicholas Forder

25 GREATEST LAST STANDS



A depiction of Custer's infamous last stand on the ridge - later known as Custer Ridge

Take a look back through military history to discover some of the most courageous final stands

In the heat of battle, the last stand is perhaps the ultimate act of heroism, or sheer desperation. Whether it's determination to preserve honour, or to defend the lives of others, taking that defiant stand against the odds - often facing death - is the stuff that legends of warfare are truly made of. Those who have made gallant last efforts to hold a position and continue the fight against the odds have done so with immense bravery, the likes of which is rare and worthy of a place in history.

To remind us of some of these inspirational acts, here are some of the greatest - from the ancient battles between Greeks and Persians, to the Battle of Waterloo and into the 20th century.

BATTLE OF LITTLE BIGHORN

25-26 JUNE, 1876

GENERAL CUSTER'S CAVALRY ARE OVERPOWERED BY THE COMBINED FORCES OF INDIAN TRIBES, LEADING TO ONE OF THE US MILITARY'S MOST NOTORIOUS DEFEATS

Fought between the 7th Regiment of the US Cavalry and the Lakota Sioux, Northern Cheyenne and Arapaho tribes, the Battle of the Little Bighorn was part of a campaign to force Native Americans into reservations during the Great Sioux War.

In 1868 many Lakota leaders agreed to the Fort Laramie Treaty, agreeing to give up the nomadic life that often brought them into conflict with other tribes and US settlers. But some leaders, including Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse, rejected the reservation system - leading to the government to hand matters over to the military.

General Philip Sheridan, commander of the Military Division of Southwest Missouri, devised a strategy to find and to engage the Lakota and Cheyenne, now considered hostile, hoping to force them back to the Great Sioux Reservation. Three forces of men numbering just under 2,500 were sent out to assist - this included the 7th Cavalry of Lt. Col. George Armstrong Custer.

But it was harder than planned - communication between the three forces was problematic. Even worse, it was difficult to find the nomadic Indians, determine how long their villages would settle for, or in which direction they could travel next. At the time of the battle, the tribes had come together at a village in south-central Montana, strengthening their numbers considerably.

On 22 June, Custer and his 7th Cavalry split from the main force to approach the tribes from the east and south, preventing them from scattering. General Alfred Terry and Colonel John Gibbon, with their infantry and cavalry, would act as a blockade from the north.

Custer marched through the night and on the morning of 25 June, they positioned near the Wolf Mountains about 12 miles distant from the Native American encampment along the Little Bighorn River. Custer initially planned to hide and launch an attack at dawn, but believing they had already been detected, he ordered an immediate advance. There was around 8,000 Native Americans in total, 1,800 of which were warriors in the village.

Custer quartered the regiment, commanding a force of 210 men. Another group, led by Major Marcus Reno, was quickly forced to withdraw after being overpowered by Cheyenne and Sioux warriors and suffering heavy casualties. As they retreated on horseback, the warriors galloped alongside, pulling them off and shooting them.

Custer's men entered the village from the other side, but great numbers of Cheyenne and Sioux turned back and charged into them, forcing Custer back to a long high ridge.

The Oglala Sioux, under the command of Crazy Horse, doubled back and enveloped Custer's men, hammering them with arrows and gunfire. As the enemy closed in, Custer ordered his men to shoot their horses and stack the carcasses to form a wall, but this proved to be inadequate protection. Within an hour they were all dead.

AGAINST THE ODDS

Number of defenders: 600 approx
Number of attackers: 1,800 approx
Attacking advantage: Greater numbers, skilled warriors, wide array of weaponry.
Defending disadvantage: Poor communication, divided numbers, unplanned charge into battle.

Aftermath

One of the biggest disasters in American military history was an iconic but brutal victory for the Native Americans

The next day the combined forces of Terry and Gibbon arrived to relieve what remained of the 7th Cavalry. The bodies of Custer's men were found mostly naked and mutilated. Inexplicably, Custer's body was not scalped or mutilated, though likely because the warriors didn't know who he was. The Indian encampment broke up, with many of the number returning to reservations, sensing there would be significant backlash to the defeat and that their traditional way of life was largely over. What remained of the hostile Native American forces was defeated as the Great Sioux War ended in May the following year.

General George A. Custer photographed in his Brigadier General uniform in 1863, 13 years before his death at Little Bighorn

MEUSE-ARGONNE OFFENSIVE

SEPTEMBER, 1918

FAMED FOR HIS SKILLS AT SHOOTING DOWN ENEMY OBSERVATION BALLOONS AND FIGHTER PLANES, LT. LUKE WAS ONE OF THE US ARMY'S TOP PILOTS – AND APPARENTLY FEARLESS

Arizona native Lt. Frank Luke, Jr (1897-1918) was one of the USA's top airmen during the First World War. In the three weeks leading up to his death, he was credited with shooting down 14 German observation balloons and four fighter planes - a record that was not beaten in the four-year war. He was also well known for disobeying orders and taking to the skies alone, which earned him a reputation among his fellow servicemen.

His final flight came in the first phase of the Allies' Meuse-Argonne Offensive on the Western Front. Lt. Luke took to the skies alone, heading behind enemy lines in the vicinity of Dun-sur-Meuse, north-east France. He was chased by eight aircraft and faced heavy ground fire, but still destroyed three observation balloons. He was hit in the chest by a machine gun while circling low to the ground and was forced to land his SPAD XIII biplane in a field near the village of Murvaux. On his way down, he strafed six German soldiers.

Despite his serious injury, Luke managed to scramble from his plane and attempted an escape, but collapsed after just 200 yards. Defiant to the very end, he pulled out his revolver and fired at the German soldiers who had finally found and surrounded him. He then died from his gunshot wound to the chest.

He was the first airman to be ever awarded the Medal of Honor, and is remembered as one of the US Air Force's most-daring and dynamic pilots.

AGAINST THE ODDS

Number of defenders: One
Number of attackers: Hundreds
Attacking advantage: After crash-landing in France, Lt. Luke was entirely alone with no back-up.
Defending disadvantage: Fatally wounded, six miles behind enemy lines, now the fighter ace had no automatic firepower.

Lt. Frank Luke stands with the wreckage of one of his planes destroyed on a successful daredevil mission to bring down enemy balloons and aircraft

SWISS GUARDSMEN FIGHT TO THE LAST

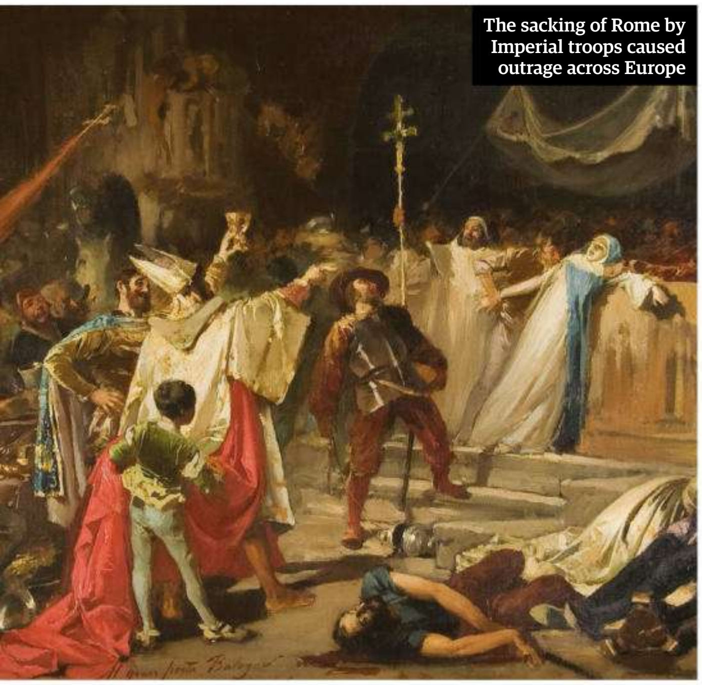
6 MAY, 1527

NUMBERS: ROMAN MILITIA: 20,000 SWISS GUARD: 500

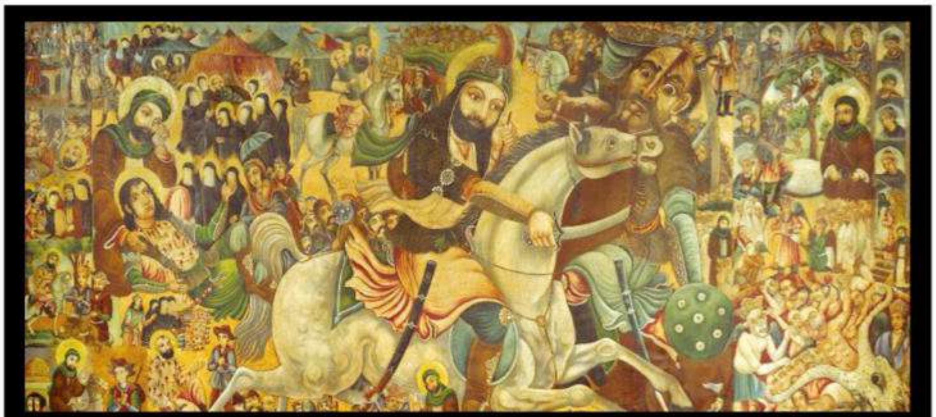
After defeating French invaders, Roman soldiers were incensed that Emperor Charles V couldn't pay them their wages. They mutinied in the thousands and headed to Rome to pillage its treasures and to murder Pope Clement VII.

As the mutineers ransacked the city, the Swiss Guards fought back, despite being significantly outnumbered. Down to just 183 men, the Guard formed a defensive square on the steps of St. Peter's Basilica, fighting off the mutinous soldiers. What followed was essentially a massacre, as the Imperial troops cut through the few but defiant Swiss Guards.

While the guards' efforts to hold the soldiers off long enough for the Pope to escape were successful, up to 12,000 people in Rome were killed. The event would mark the end of the Roman Renaissance, and irreparably damage the relationship between the Emperor and Catholic Church.



The sacking of Rome by Imperial troops caused outrage across Europe

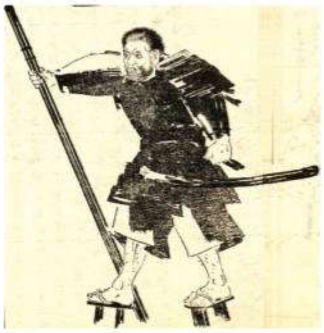


BATTLE OF KARBALA 10 OCTOBER, 680 CE

In a battle that took place in what is now Iraq, the Umayyad caliph Yazid's army of thousands clashed with the grandson of Muhammad, Hussein Ibn Ali, and his followers - numbering just 70. All were killed while making their stand.

BATTLE OF KOROMO RIVER 15 JUNE, 1189

Stood alone on the drawbridge of Koromogawa no tate, the warrior monk Saito Musashibo Benkei held back an entire army. Inside the castle, his lord had retreated to commit sepukku, having been defeated in a conflict with his own brother. Benkei killed over 300 men before he eventually died standing, riddled with arrows.



PASIR PANJANG 13 FEBRUARY, 1942

In a combined Allied effort, 1,400 Malay, British and Australian soldiers battled 13,000 Japanese troops to save Singapore. In the dying hours, Malay Lieutenant Adnan Bin Saidi led a 42-man platoon against thousands. He was tortured and executed for causing unexpectedly high numbers of Japanese casualties.

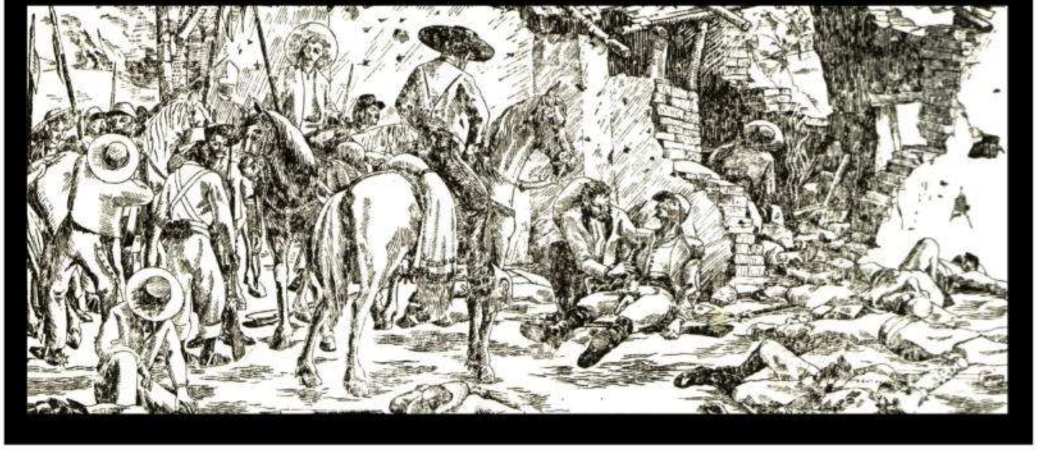
BATTLE OF CAMERONE 30 APRIL, 1863

NUMBERS: MEXICO: 2,500 (APPROX) FOREIGN LEGION: 65

During the Siege of Puebla, Mexico, in 1863, France sent a shipment of supplies to Veracruz under the protection of the 3rd company of the Foreign Regiment. The company, whose mission was an effort to support Napoleon III's campaign, would become the foundation of the Legion's unofficial, and somewhat morbid, motto: "The Legion dies, it does not surrender".

When Captain Jean Danjou and his company were ambushed by a Mexican force, the French troops retreated to a nearby hacienda, beginning a siege that would last over ten hours. The legionnaires stood with their backs to the wall, fighting until only five of them remained.

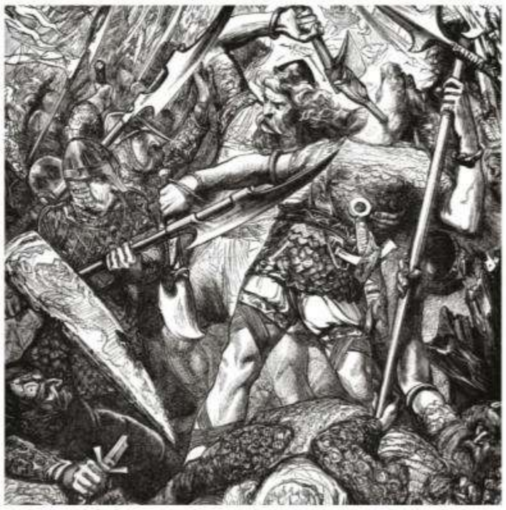
The men fixed bayonets to their weapons and charged, shouting "Vive l'France!" The last two were overpowered, but they negotiated their surrender to keep their regimental colours and weapons, carrying their dead, and having their wounded lieutenant treated. The French Foreign Legion continues to celebrate the gallant effort each year on 30 April, known as Camerone Day.



BATTLE OF HASTINGS

14 OCTOBER, 1066

After William the Conqueror feigned a retreat, King Harold's infantry followed and were ambushed in the open field. Harold and his housecarl bodyguards stood fast on the ridge, awaiting William's final charge. Harold was killed with an arrow to the eye and the Saxon forces retreated. The housecarls surrounded the king's body and fought to their death.



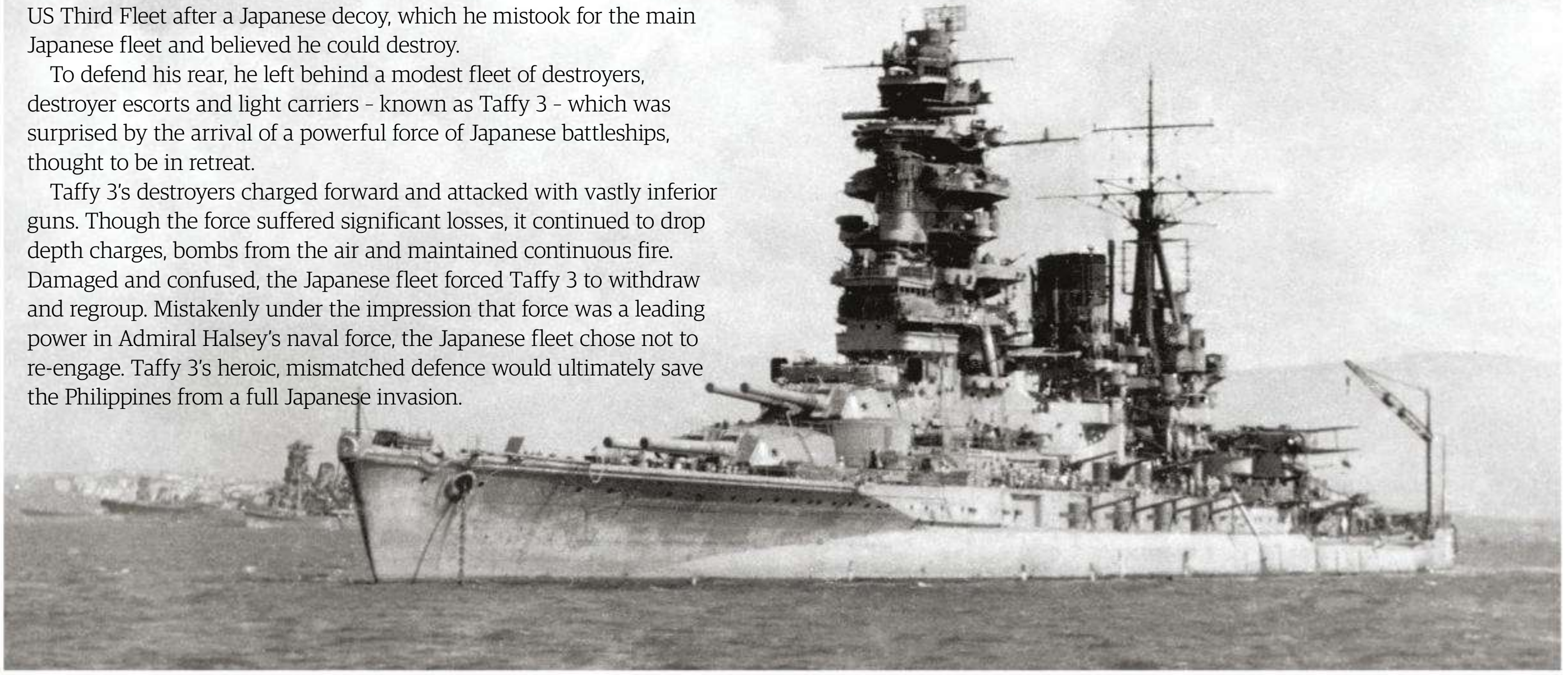
BATTLE OFF SAMAR 25 OCTOBER, 1944

NUMBERS: JAPAN: 4 BATTLESHIPS, 6 HEAVY CRUISERS, 2 LIGHT CRUISERS, 11 DESTROYERS, KAMIKAZE US: 6 ESCORT CARRIERS, 3 DESTROYERS, 4 DESTROYER ESCORTS, AIRCRAFT

Known as one of naval history's greatest mismatches, the battle began when Admiral William Halsey, Jr. was lured into taking his powerful US Third Fleet after a Japanese decoy, which he mistook for the main Japanese fleet and believed he could destroy.

To defend his rear, he left behind a modest fleet of destroyers, destroyer escorts and light carriers - known as Taffy 3 - which was surprised by the arrival of a powerful force of Japanese battleships, thought to be in retreat.

Taffy 3's destroyers charged forward and attacked with vastly inferior guns. Though the force suffered significant losses, it continued to drop depth charges, bombs from the air and maintained continuous fire. Damaged and confused, the Japanese fleet forced Taffy 3 to withdraw and regroup. Mistakenly under the impression that force was a leading power in Admiral Halsey's naval force, the Japanese fleet chose not to re-engage. Taffy 3's heroic, mismatched defence would ultimately save the Philippines from a full Japanese invasion.



BATTLE OF ARNHEM 17-26 SEPTEMBER, 1944

SURROUNDED AND WITH LITTLE FIREPOWER, A SMALL BAND OF PARATROOPERS OVERCOME THE ODDS FOR FOUR BLOODY DAYS

After charging through France and Belgium in the summer, one last natural barrier stood between the Allied troops and Germany – the River Rhine. From the Allies' need to conquer this barrier came Operation Market Garden.

Masterminded by General Bernard Montgomery, commander of the British forces in Europe, Market Garden was one of the boldest plans of the Second World War. 30,000 British and American airborne troops were to be flown behind enemy lines to capture the eight bridges across a network of canals and rivers on the border of Holland and Germany. At the same time, British tanks and infantry planned to push up a narrow road from the Allied front to these key bridges. They would relieve the airborne troops and cross the bridges.

The troops set to make the drop were from the First Allied Airborne Army, which included one British and two American divisions. They would drop into the towns of Eindhoven, Nijmegen and Arnhem to take the bridges, which would give them an advantage.

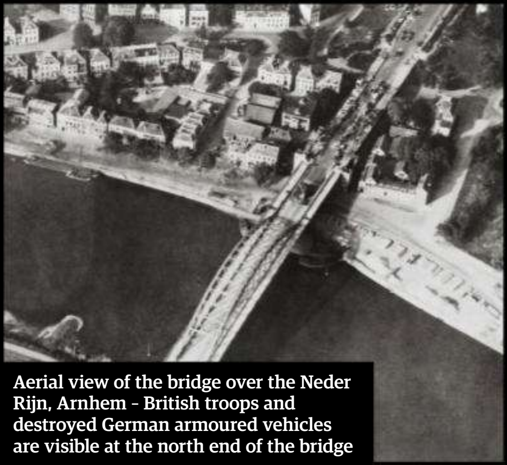
But there were problems: unknown to Allied intelligence, two SS Panzer divisions were stationed around Arnhem, with many tanks and vehicles; also, the Allies had too few aircraft to deliver all their troops at once. They would be dropped over three days, at a site seven miles away to avoid anti-aircraft guns, therefore losing the element of surprise. Though the drop was successful, the journey to Arnhem was much more problematic.

As Allied troops collected up their equipment and headed towards Arnhem, Wehrmacht forces were quick to regroup and organise their efforts against the airborne troops. The German infantry was determined, and made a defensive perimeter near-impenetrable for many of the Allied battalions. Adding to the problems, the Allies quickly discovered their radios weren't working, which broke down all communication and the ability to co-ordinate the attack. The XXX Corps, which had been following the Allied aircraft from the ground, had made slow progress and not reached any of the bridges to offer support.

Despite German resistance, some American forces reached their designated bridges only to find they'd been destroyed. One British battalion – just over 700 men led by Lieutenant Colonel John Frost – made it through to Arnhem bridge, and by evening captured the northern end. However, their numbers were relatively small and they were only lightly armed. Soon they found they were cut off from the rest of their division and were surrounded by the 9th SS Panzer division.

As American forces spent the next few days trying to reach their British allies at Arnhem bridge, they suffered huge losses. Despite this, British paratroopers held their position at the north end of the bridge for four days, short on basic supplies, massively outnumbered and still awaiting delayed reinforcements. The paratroopers surprised German forces with their continued counterattacks and despite the merciless artillery fire they refused to give up their position. By the time the Americans took the Nijmegen bridge, it was too late for the paratroopers – the enemy had moved tanks into the town, demolishing the houses in which the British were fighting. With limited anti-tank weapons, no food and most crucially little ammunition, it was only a matter of time before the British would capitulate.

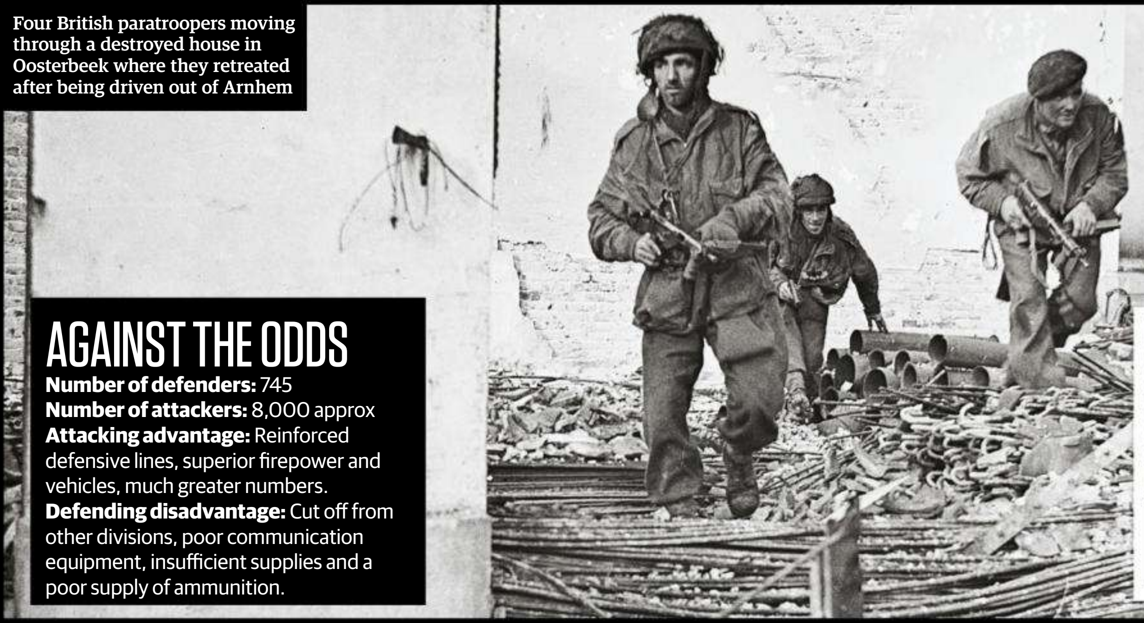
On the fourth day, the paratroopers were overpowered. Those who weren't wounded or captured had little choice but to withdraw, retreating to the village of Oosterbeek, where a small pocket of British troops were holding out. The Allied troops had overstretched their efforts, earning the event the moniker of "a bridge too far".


Aerial view of the bridge over the Neder Rijn, Arnhem – British troops and destroyed German armoured vehicles are visible at the north end of the bridge

Aftermath

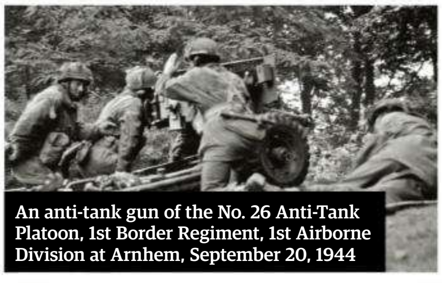
The British paratroopers' efforts are a remarkable event in what was an overall disaster

Of the 10,000 men who landed at Arnhem, 1,400 would be killed and over 6,000 captured. Just a couple of thousand paratroopers would escape, safely crossing to the south bank of the Rhine in small rubber boats. Though a valiant effort from the airborne troops, it was a dark time for the British army and would halt the progress of the Allied campaign. General Montgomery had intended to end the war by December 1944 on the back of Market Garden, but instead it would be four months before the Allies successfully crossed the Rhine, with the war raging on until September 1945.


Four British paratroopers moving through a destroyed house in Oosterbeek where they retreated after being driven out of Arnhem

AGAINST THE ODDS

Number of defenders: 745
Number of attackers: 8,000 approx
Attacking advantage: Reinforced defensive lines, superior firepower and vehicles, much greater numbers.
Defending disadvantage: Cut off from other divisions, poor communication equipment, insufficient supplies and a poor supply of ammunition.


An anti-tank gun of the No. 26 Anti-Tank Platoon, 1st Border Regiment, 1st Airborne Division at Arnhem, September 20, 1944

BATTLE OF WIZNA

7-10 SEPTEMBER 1939

In a phenomenal show of resistance to the Nazi invasion, 720 recent Polish conscripts battled to defend the village of Wizna. It had been fortified before the war, but was put to the test when 42,200 Germans brought in tanks and artillery. Though outnumbered by 60 to 1, the Poles held Wizna for three days.

BATTLE OF SAIPAN

15 JUNE-9 JULY 1944

NUMBERS: JAPANESE: 5,000 (APPROX) USA: ONE

The Battle of Saipan was fought between thousands for a whole month, as the USA and Japan battled to occupy islands in the Pacific. However, it's the heroic actions of one 28-year-old private soldier, Thomas Baker, that are remembered as one of the US Army's greatest last stands.

On expedition to retake the island of Mariana, Pvt. Baker's company was attacked by 5,000 Japanese troops. Though overpowered, Baker held the line - taking out many soldiers single-handedly, breaking his own rifle by using it as a club and at one point charging 100 yards ahead of his unit with a bazooka to destroy a Japanese emplacement. In the closing moments of the Japanese assault, as the company was surrounded, Baker became seriously wounded.

Though he had been dragged from battle, Baker insisted on being propped against a tree in a sitting position, where he was left with his service pistol and eight rounds of ammunition.

This is where his body was found some time later, in the same position, but with the gun empty and eight dead Japanese soldiers around him. He was posthumously promoted to Sergeant and awarded the prestigious Medal of Honor.

TEXAS DEFENDS THE ALAMO MISSION

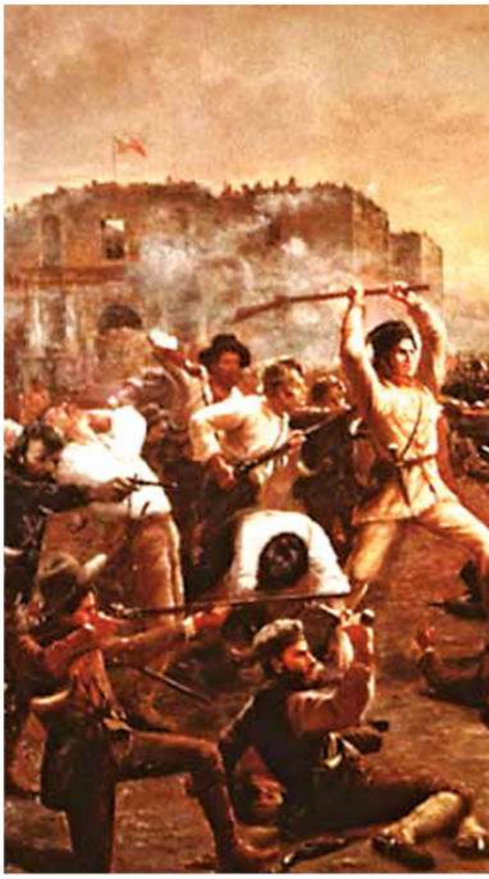
23 FEB-6 MAR, 1836

NUMBERS: MEXICO: 2,000 (APPROX) TEXAS: 189 (APPROX)

In the final days of the Texas Revolution - a territorial conflict between the Mexican government and Texas colonists - poorly armed Texan rebels defended the old Spanish mission from one of Mexico's finest generals, Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna. Driven out in the months before, the Mexican troops had returned to reclaim Texas, but the hopelessly outnumbered Texans, including frontiersman David Crockett and James Bowie, fought back, beginning a siege that lasted for almost two weeks.

On the final day, Santa Anna launched a surprise pre-dawn attack - a full assault on the mission that forced the Texan defenders to retreat as they were overpowered by the Mexican cavalry. The last of the Texans to die were 11 men manning a cannon in the chapel, bayoneted to death as Mexican soldiers broke through the doors.

It was a hugely significant event in Texan history, as the Republic of Texas was declared an independent nation during the time of the siege, leading to its eventual annexation into the United States of America. The Battle of the Alamo is symbolic of unshakable Texan pride in the face of adversity.



THE 101ST AIRBORNE HOLDS BASTOGNE

20-27 DECEMBER, 1944

JUST DAYS AFTER THE EXHAUSTED AND ILL-EQUIPPED 101ST AIRBORNE DIVISION ARRIVED IN BASTOGNE, IT BECAME SURROUNDED – FIGHTING TO DEFEND THE TOWN'S ALL-IMPORTANT CROSSROADS

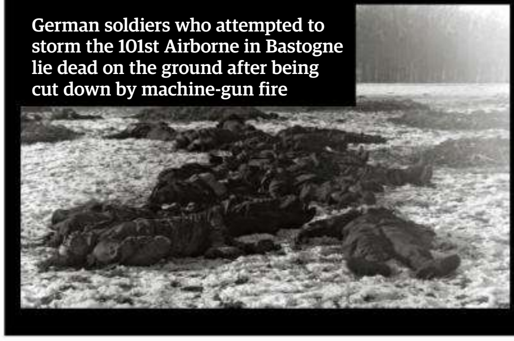
Following the Normandy Invasion, the German Wehrmacht had lost the harbour at Antwerp - to re-take it, Hitler initiated the Battle of the Bulge, part of which included his forces seizing control of the Belgian town of Bastogne. Numerous important roads passed through the town, making it of strategic importance to both sides.

The 101st Airborne arrived in Bastogne on 18 December and two days later, German forces mounted a surprise attack through the Ardennes mountains; they surrounded the town and on 20 December commenced artillery fire. The following day, all roadways into Bastogne were cut off.

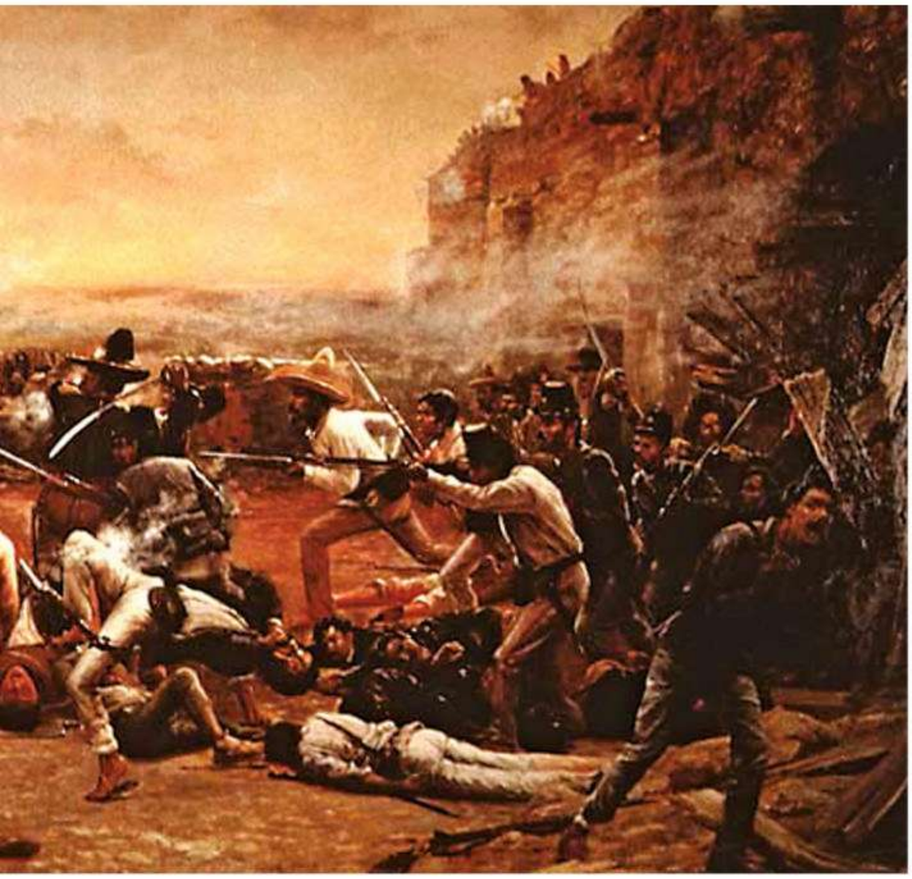
The enemy also dropped bombs on the town, but the 101st stood fast and refused to concede its lines. On 22 December, German commander Lt. Gen. Heinrich Freiherr von Luttwitz sent in two surrendering soldiers with a note demanding the Americans' surrender, to which Brig. Gen. Anthony McAuliffe famously exclaimed: "Nuts!"

The weather cleared and supplies could be airlifted to the US troops. Mistakes by the German attackers also helped the American survival - troops were moved towards the town of Meuse, weakening the circle and helping the 101st hold the crossroads. After seven days of fighting, parts of General Patton's Third Army arrived, breaking the German encirclement and ending the siege.

The successfully defended siege proved a defining victory for the US and turned the tide not just in the Battle of the Bulge, but the whole war. From here, Allied forces advanced, marking the beginning of the end for Nazi Germany.

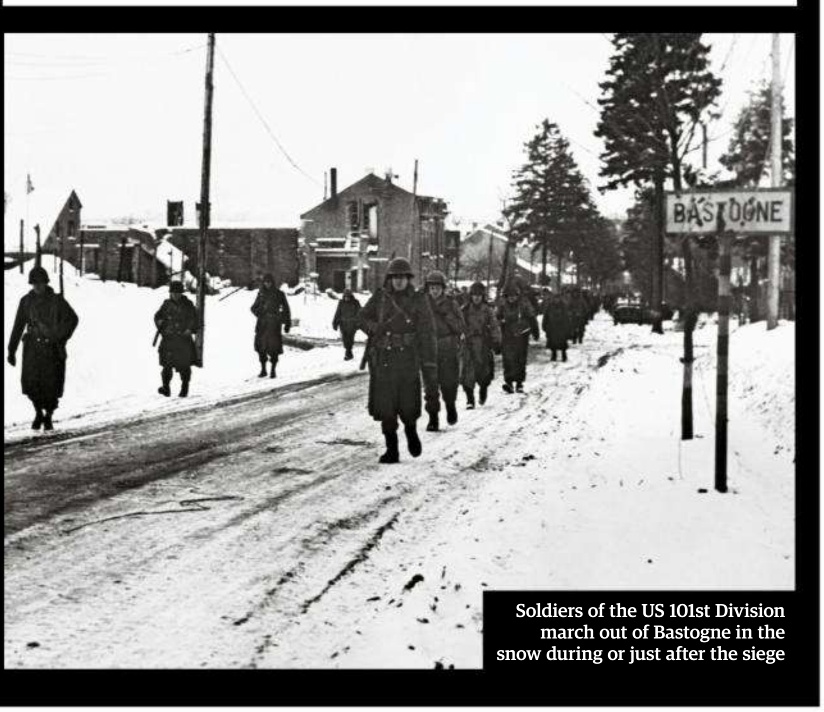


German soldiers who attempted to storm the 101st Airborne in Bastogne lie dead on the ground after being cut down by machine-gun fire

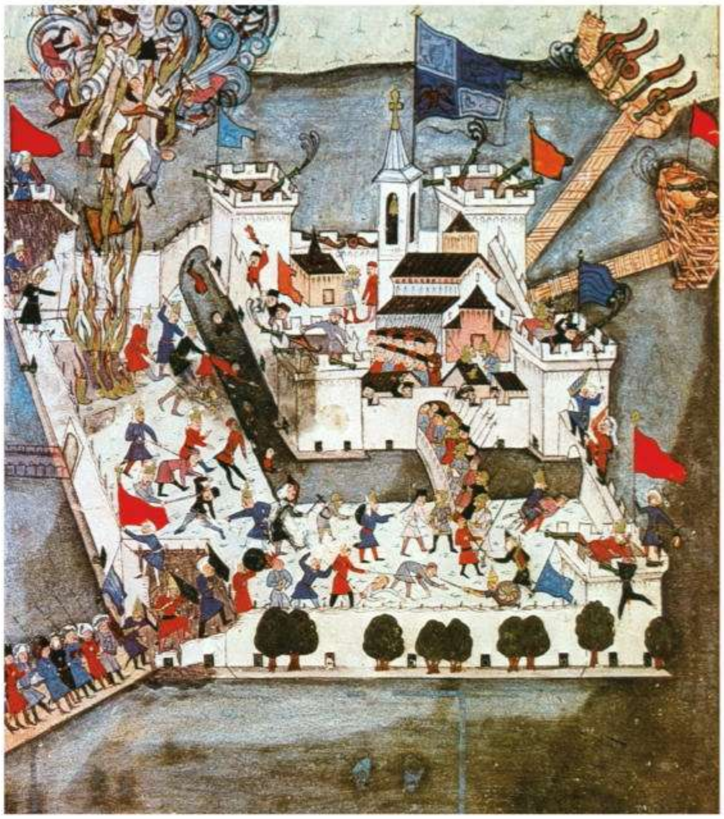


AGAINST THE ODDS

Number of defenders: 12,000 approx
Number of attackers: 54,000 approx
Attacking advantage: Much larger numbers encircling the 101st Airborne, with superior equipment and access to supplies.
Defending disadvantage: Lack of sufficient winter clothing, no supplies due to weather, exhaustion from prior combat in Holland.



Soldiers of the US 101st Division march out of Bastogne in the snow during or just after the siege



SIEGE OF SZIGETVÁR

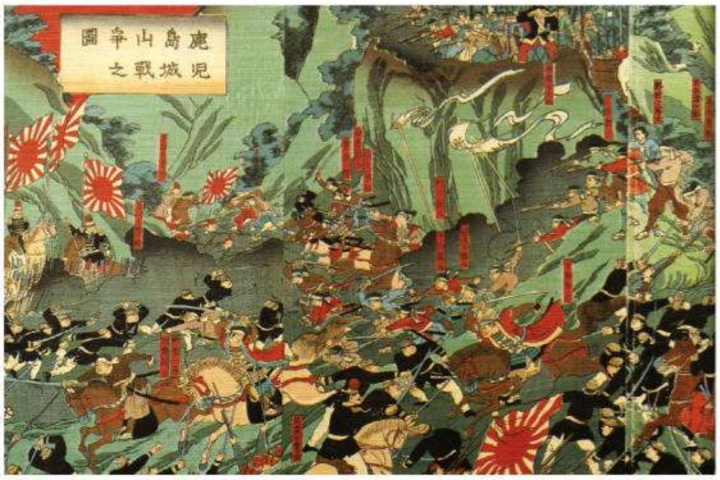
5 AUG-7 SEPT, 1566

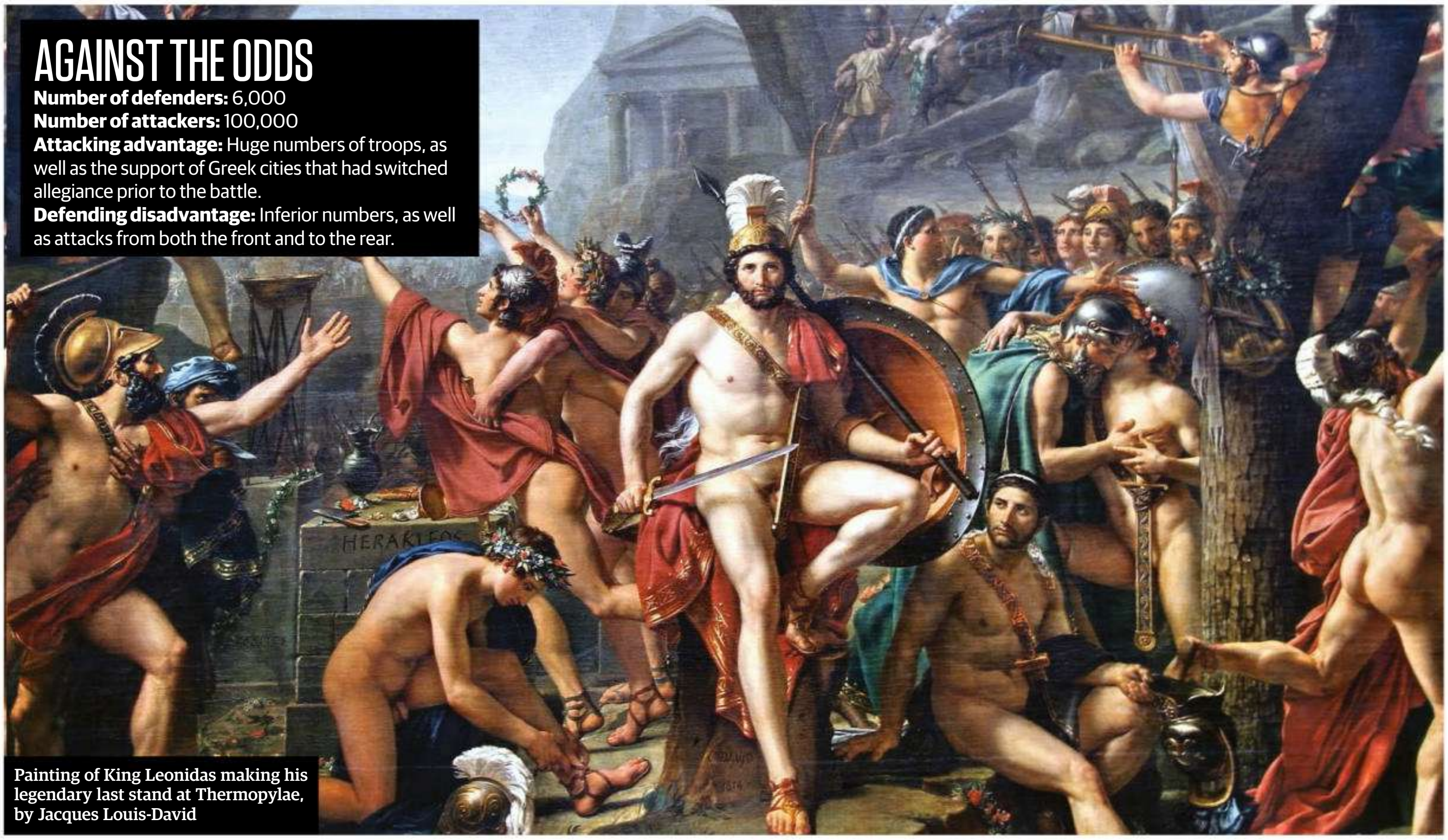
As Ottoman Emperor Suleiman the Magnificent pushed into Hungary, he met Count Nikola Zrinski, whose 2,500 men held an army of 100,000 off the Szigetvár fortress for a month. Before his death, Zrinski booby-trapped the fortress with explosives, killing thousands of Ottoman soldiers as they eventually stormed the building.

BATTLE OF SHIROYAMA

24 SEPTEMBER, 1877

In the final battle of the Satsuma Rebellion - in which samurai revolted against the new imperialist government - Saigo Takamori and his 300 samurai were surrounded by 30,000 armed imperial troops. The samurai fought with their bows and katanas, but eventually succumbed to an artillery bombardment. The samurai all perished, ending the rebellion.





AGAINST THE ODDS

Number of defenders: 6,000
Number of attackers: 100,000
Attacking advantage: Huge numbers of troops, as well as the support of Greek cities that had switched allegiance prior to the battle.
Defending disadvantage: Inferior numbers, as well as attacks from both the front and to the rear.

Painting of King Leonidas making his legendary last stand at Thermopylae, by Jacques Louis-David

BATTLE OF THERMOPYLAE

480 BCE

AS THE GREEKS WENT TO WAR WITH THE INVADING PERSIANS, SPARTAN KING LEONIDAS LED A SMALL ARMY TO NEAR VICTORY

The Persian king Xerxes' invasion of Greece in 480BCE forced the cities to unite in battle. With Spartan king Leonidas leading the charge, they made the decision to defend a narrow pass between the mountains and the sea, called Thermopylae.

The Persians arrived at the pass, but several days went by without battle. When a scout was sent to find out the Greek position, he returned to say the Spartans were combing their hair and exercising. King Xerxes was warned - they were preparing for war. Finally, the Persians launched the attack.

The Greek army defended the pass from behind a wall blocking the path, from behind which it successfully fended off wave after wave of attacking Persians. In the narrow space, the Persian horde couldn't utilise its greater numbers and the Greeks' longer spears proved highly efficient. Occasionally the Greeks feigned retreat, only to turn and overpower the Persians who had been tricked into pursuit.

After two days, a Greek traitor revealed a pathway leading behind Leonidas' men, enabling the Persians to execute a sneak attack. The Spartan warriors among the Greek forces refused to flee despite this disadvantage, and chose to fight on. Eventually, they withdrew to a nearby hillock and battled with what strength they had left. Before long the sheer number of Persian soldiers became too great and volleys of arrows overwhelmed the Spartans.

The Persian army went on to march into central Greece, causing havoc and destruction and conquering most of the country. However, Leonidas and his men became martyrs, boosting the Greeks' morale in their efforts to repel Xerxes' invading forces - eventually expelling them the next year.

DEFENSE OF BREST FORTRESS

22-29 JUNE, 1941

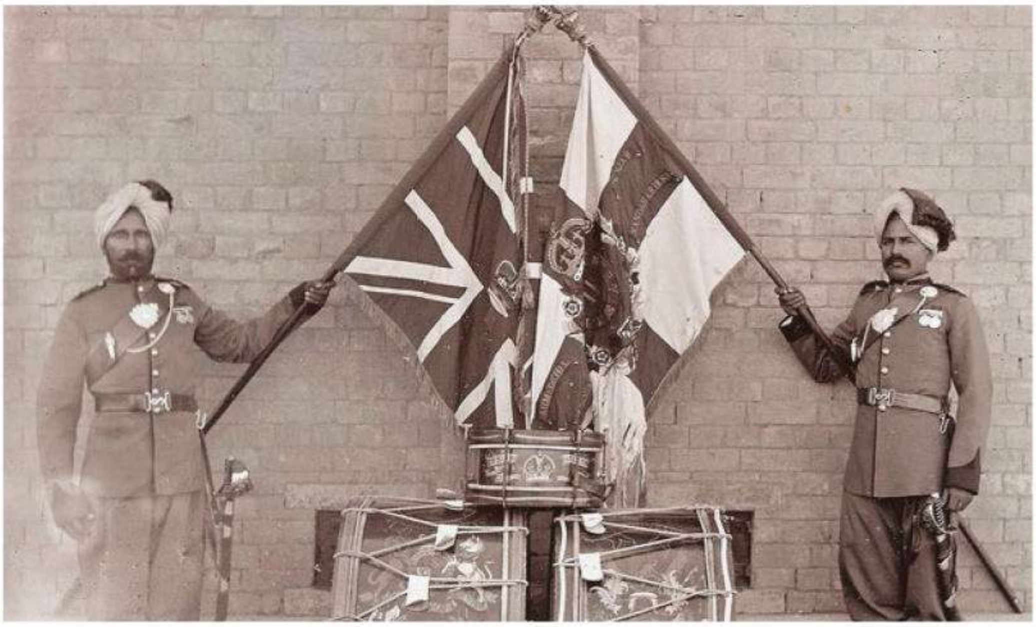
NUMBERS: SOVIET: 9,000 (APPROX) AXIS: 20,000 (APPROX)

In one of the first battles of the pivotal Operation Barbarossa, Soviet troops and civilians made one of the Second World War's most defining and courageous last stands.

Launching a surprise attack of Brest Fortress, in Belarus on the Russian-Polish border, Axis forces initiated their first major battle with Soviet forces. In addition to the 9,000 Soviet soldiers, border guards and NKVD operatives inside the fortress, there were 300 family members of the soldiers - who helped by reloading guns, providing food and even fighting.

As the battle raged for seven days, the Soviets developed defensive encampments in the fortress that held back the Germans, who suffered heavy casualties - over 1,000 dead or wounded.

The fortress finally fell on 29 June. The Soviet forces lost 2,000 men and nearly 7,000 captured, but the fortress remained a symbol of Soviet strength. The battle itself, meanwhile, was a precursor to the Nazis' struggle in trying to take the USSR.



BATTLE OF SARAGARHI

12 SEPTEMBER, 1897

NUMBERS: PASHTUNS: 10,000 SIKHS: 21

The British struggled to hold India, and it often proved too big for British government to control. In 1897 it faced one of its biggest challenges yet - an attack at the North-West Frontier Province, part of British India and today part of Pakistan. The area was occupied by the tribal Pashtuns, who had rejected British rule.

In September 1897, Pashtuns launched an attack, charging the signalling post in Saragarhi to cut off communication between British forts.

The post was defended by a small band of Sikhs, just 21 individuals from the 36th Sikh Regiment, who all chose to fight to the death, using up all of their ammunition before taking on the attackers in hand-to-hand combat. They killed nearly 600 Pashtuns before eventually being overpowered.

The Pashtun rising was crushed two days later under heavy artillery fire. The 36th Sikh Regiment continues to commemorate the battle every year on 12 September.

SIEGE OF JADOTVILLE

SEPTEMBER, 1961

NUMBERS: CONGOLESE: 5,000 IRISH: 150

On a United Nations peacekeeping mission during the Katanga conflict in the Congo, a company of Irish support troops was deployed to the city of Jadotville, arriving without support staff or adequate supplies.

On a Sunday morning, while the mostly Catholic troops were attending mass, a band of mercenaries and local tribesmen loyal to Katangese Prime Minister Moise Tshombe attacked the UN troops' outpost.

The attackers came with aircraft and mortar support, while the Irish had light anti-personnel weapons and antiquated Vickers machine guns. The besieged troops famously reported: "We will hold out until our last bullet is spent. Could do with some whiskey."

The Katangese attacked in waves of 600, but the Irish response was effective and precise, concentrating its fire on Katangese machine gun and mortar posts.

Under the bombardment, the Irish held out for six days, killing 300 of the attackers and wounding up to 1,000 more, before being forced to surrender when they exhausted their ammunition. It was the only time since the creation of the Irish state that its troops had been in combat with another nation.

BATTLE OF THE IMJIN RIVER

22-25 APRIL, 1951

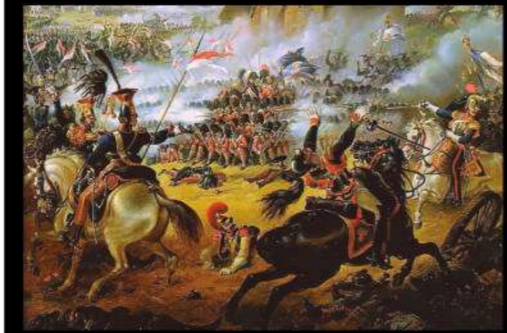
A year into the Korean War, 10,000 Chinese troops attacked a small UN defensive line. The isolated Gloucestershire Regiment - just 650 men, immortalised as "the Glorious Glosters" - took the worst of it. They withdrew and reformed on a nearby hill, where they stood and fought for 24 hours, until being ordered to retreat. Of the 650, only 40 escaped.

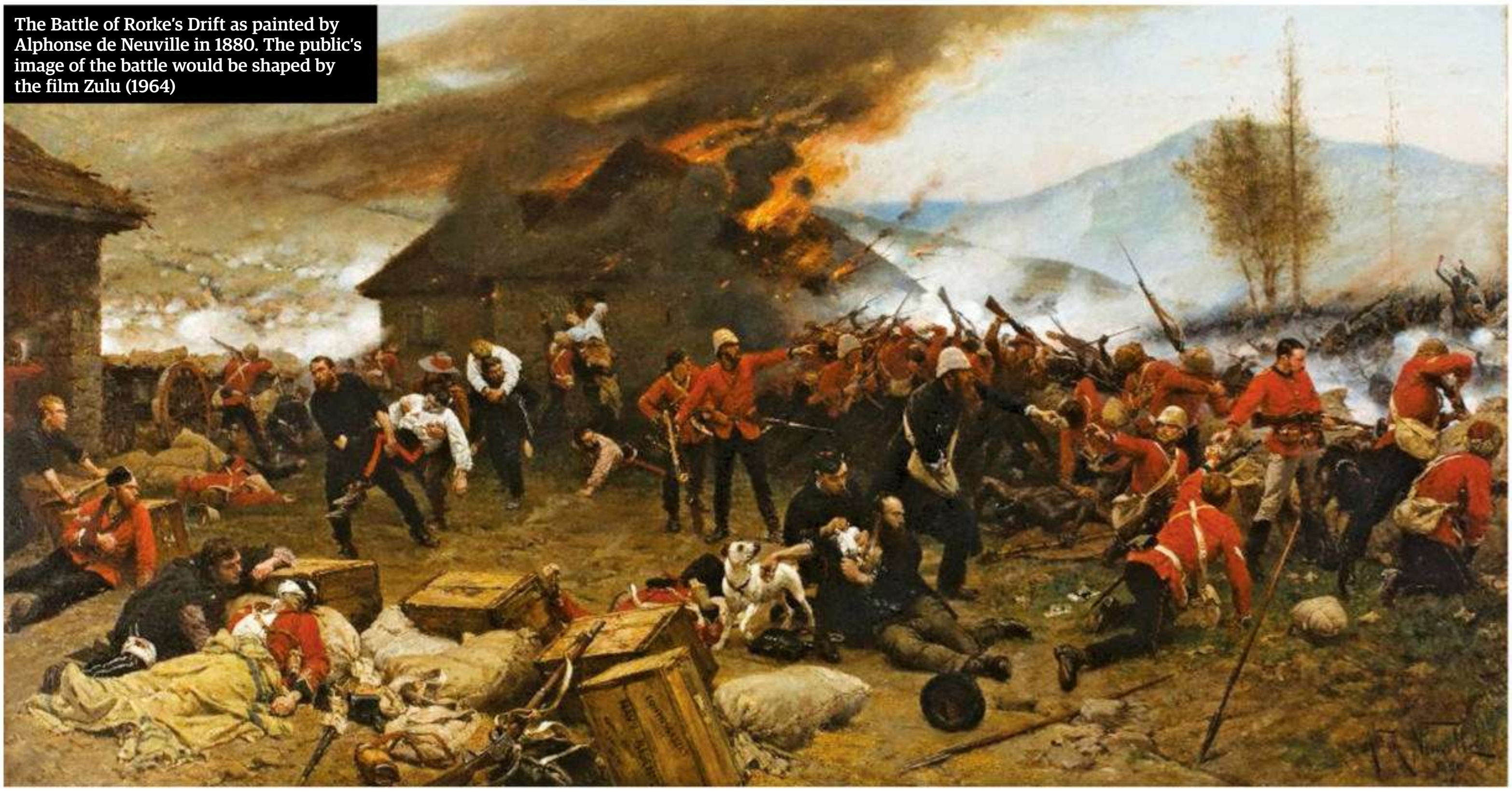
A squad of the 3rd Ranger Co., 3rd Infantry Division, moves out of assembly area to probe Chinese Communist territory north of the Imjin River, Korea. 17 April 1951

THE OLD GUARD AT WATERLOO

18 JUNE, 1815

As the British pushed back Napoleon's Imperial Guards, charging forward with bayonets fixed, it looked certain that the French were defeated. All that remained was the Old Guard, which had been waiting in reserve. They stood their ground, until relentless attacks eventually left none alive.





The Battle of Rorke's Drift as painted by Alphonse de Neuville in 1880. The public's image of the battle would be shaped by the film Zulu (1964)

BATTLE OF RORKE'S DRIFT 22-23 JANUARY, 1879

A SMALL BRITISH POST IS CHARGED BY THOUSANDS OF ZULU WARRIORS – LEADING TO ONE OF THE BRITISH MILITARY'S MOST CELEBRATED VICTORIES

Intent on establishing a colony, British forces invaded Zululand and sought out the army of Zulu king Cetshwayo. Underestimating the Zulus' fighting abilities, the British divided and suffered a surprise attack at Isandlwana, losing almost 1,700 men. Then the Zulu Army proceeded across the Buffalo River to Rorke's Drift, where the British had already established a depot and hospital.

Using bags of maize, canned food, and biscuit boxes as makeshift barricades, the British soldiers at Rorke's Drift - which famously included Colonel John Chard, Major Gonville Bromhead, and Corporal William Allen - held back the Zulus with their gunfire. Any enemy warrior that managed to climb the barricades was repelled with bayonets. British soldiers too wounded to fight - including those who had made it back from Isandlwana - helped reload the guns and distribute ammunition. Some Zulus eventually broke into the hospital and speared the patients within, though they were eventually fought off and the surviving patients rescued.

After 12 hours of fighting the Zulus eventually retreated, leaving behind 400 dead. But the British soldiers were by this point low on ammunition - if the Zulus were to mount another attack, it was likely they would break through.

The last stand was held up as a definitive act of British heroism and a welcome means of boosting public morale in the face of the Isandlwana massacre. The survivors of Rorke's Drift were awarded 11 Victoria Crosses and five Distinguished Conduct Medal. Zululand was declared a British territory the following year. The battle became a popular story in British military history and a powerful example of how a courageous last stand on the battlefield can overshadow other losses.

AGAINST THE ODDS

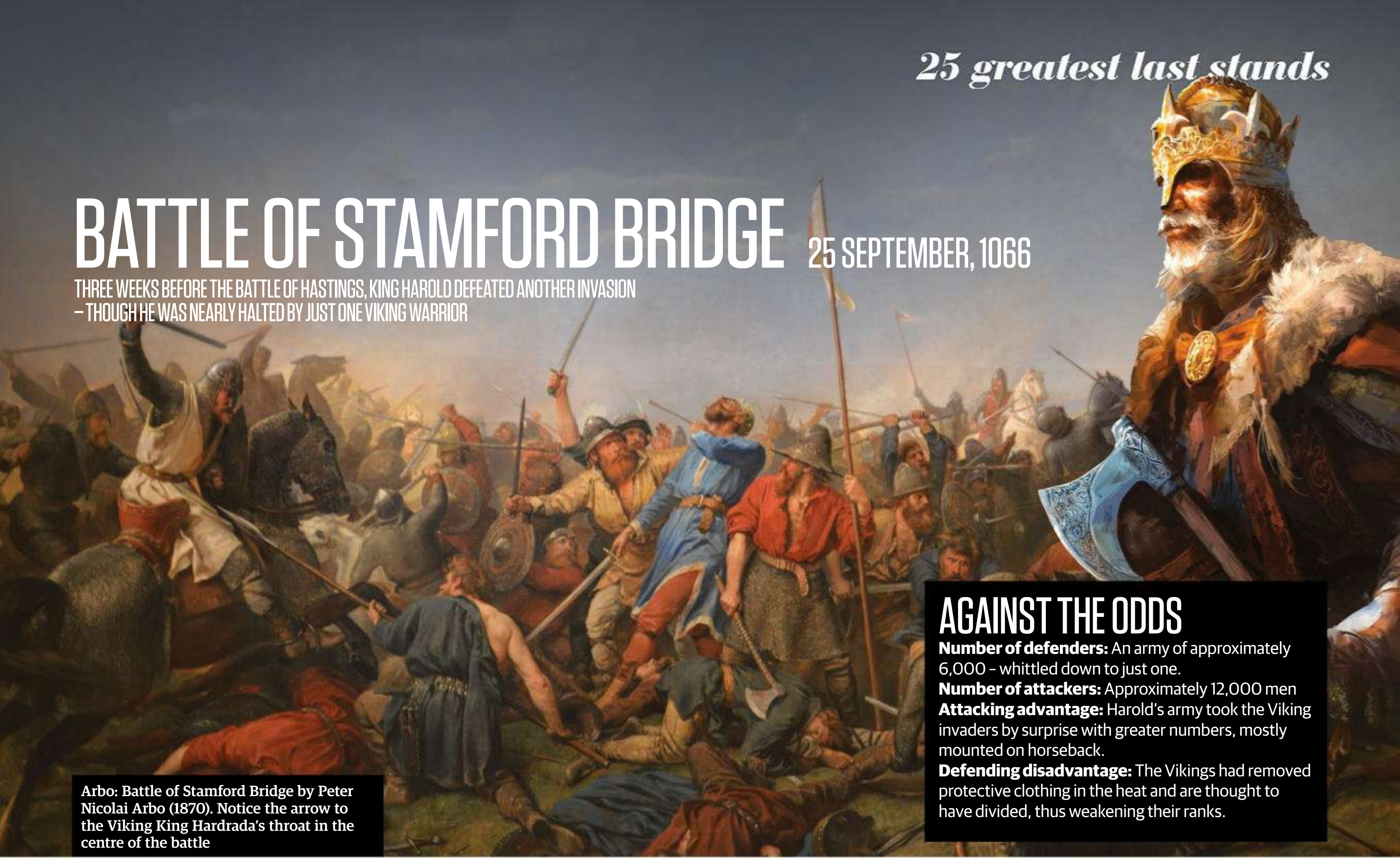
Number of defenders: 139
Number of attackers: 4,000
Attacking advantage: Superior numbers, high ground, knowledge of the terrain.
Defending disadvantage: Defenders weren't the soldiering elite, mostly made up from cooks, engineers and supply clerks.

British survivors standing on the battlefield at Rorke's Drift

BATTLE OF STAMFORD BRIDGE

25 SEPTEMBER, 1066

THREE WEEKS BEFORE THE BATTLE OF HASTINGS, KING HAROLD DEFEATED ANOTHER INVASION – THOUGH HE WAS NEARLY HALTED BY JUST ONE VIKING WARRIOR



Arbo: Battle of Stamford Bridge by Peter Nicolai Arbo (1870). Notice the arrow to the Viking King Hardrada's throat in the centre of the battle

AGAINST THE ODDS

Number of defenders: An army of approximately 6,000 – whittled down to just one.

Number of attackers: Approximately 12,000 men

Attacking advantage: Harold's army took the Viking invaders by surprise with greater numbers, mostly mounted on horseback.

Defending disadvantage: The Vikings had removed protective clothing in the heat and are thought to have divided, thus weakening their ranks.

The Viking King Harald Hardrada, challenger to the English throne, had landed in Yorkshire accompanied by the English King Harold's brother, Earl Tostig. The Vikings defeated Morcar, Earl of Northumberland and Edwin, Earl of Mercia in a battle, before receiving the surrender of York.

Of course the other infamous claimant to the throne, William of Normandy, maintained Edward the Confessor had promised him the English throne before his death. Aware of the Viking invasion, William decided to delay his own invasion until Harold was at his most vulnerable, dealing with Hardrada in the North.

King Harold was in a difficult position - he anticipated the arrival of William in the south any day. Would he travel north to deal with the Vikings, or stay where he was to await William's attack? Harold chose to march north, hoping to defeat Hardrada and the Vikings before returning south in time to meet William.

Hardrada travelled to Stamford Bridge, where he had agreed to exchange hostages. Expecting Harold to remain in the south under the threat of Norman invasion, the Viking king left a third of his troops and armour at his base camp at Riccall on the River Ouse.

Harold's army, most likely mounted troops, reached York on the morning of September 25. Reinforced by what remained of Morcar's and Edwin's forces, he marched to Stamford Bridge, taking Hardrada completely by surprise.

Harold's army charged towards the Vikings, devastating them immediately. Those who weren't killed immediately struggled to pull their armour on and make a defensive line. They managed to form a circle to hold back the English, but the ambush had already laid waste to many of their number - deciding the outcome of the bloody battle long before it was finished.

The advance of Harold's army was delayed by the need to pass through the narrow chokepoint of the bridge. Blocking the way was one lone Viking, an anonymous warrior who stood wielding a great axe. Harold's troops tried to cross, but the lone Viking cut down every one who challenged him. He held this position for over an hour, single-handedly killing up to 40 English soldiers.

Unable to defeat him face-to-face, Harold's men had to come up with an alternative means of chopping down the warrior. One of the English soldiers floated in a barrel in the river below, paddling under the bridge. From this position he thrust a spear through the wooden slats of the bridge, stabbing the Viking in the groin and mortally wounding him.

Finally, the English soldiers could advance. They found the Norse army formed into a shield wall, leading to brutal hand-to-hand combat that lasted for hours. But it was already too late for the Vikings: Harald Hardrada was killed with an arrow to the throat and the treacherous Earl Tostig slain on the battlefield. It was to be a victory for the English.

WAKE ISLAND

8-23 DECEMBER, 1941

The day after Pearl Harbor, the Pacific outpost of Wake Island was attacked by around 30 Japanese aircraft. But a small combined force of US marines, sailors and civilians fended off the Japanese's first landing attempt, sinking two destroyers and damaging a cruiser. The Japanese succeeded in taking the island on 23 December, but lost up to 1,000 men.

Aftermath

Despite the lone Viking's efforts, the battle was a decisive victory for Harold

The lone Viking's last stand was seemingly Harold's biggest obstacle in the battle. Overall the victory proved Harold to be an able commander, while his troops – particularly the housecarls – proved themselves highly skilled. The victory at Stamford Bridge will forever be linked to Harold's defeat at the Battle of Hastings, which took place less than three weeks later. Had Harold not been forced to leave William's landing in the south unopposed, later facing him with an army that had suffered losses and was stricken by fatigue, then the outcome could have been very different.

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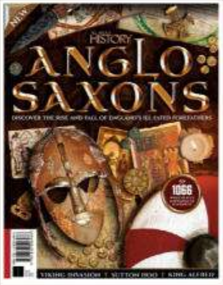
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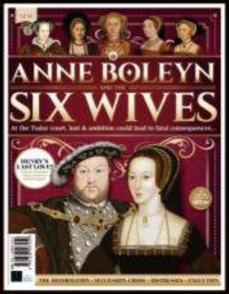
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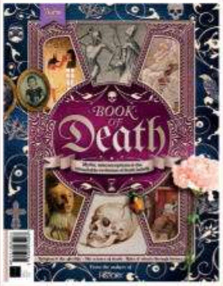
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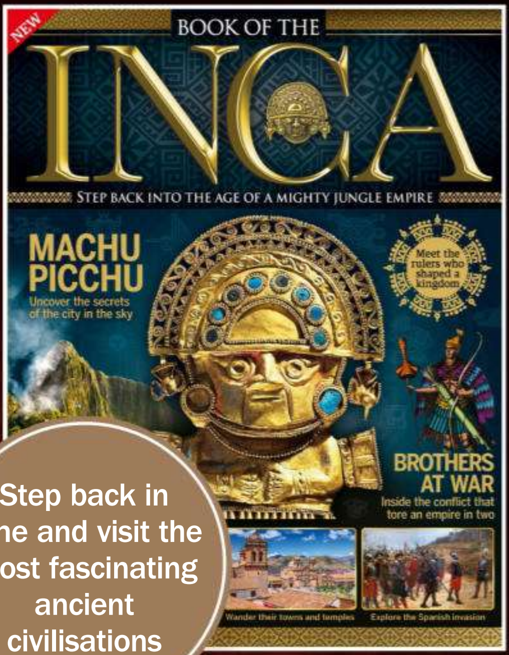
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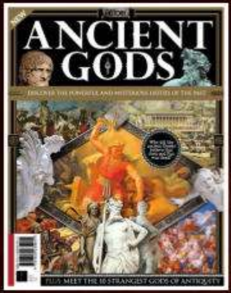
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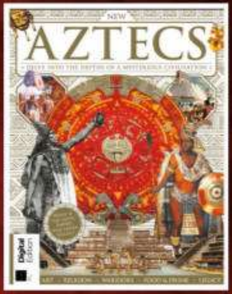

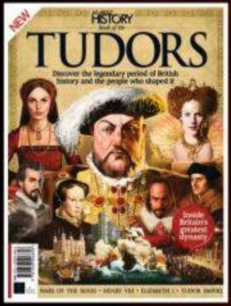
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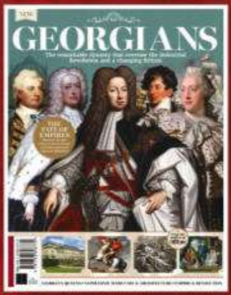
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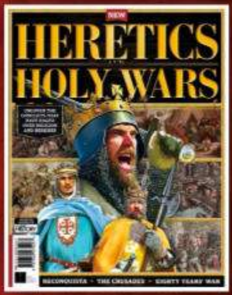
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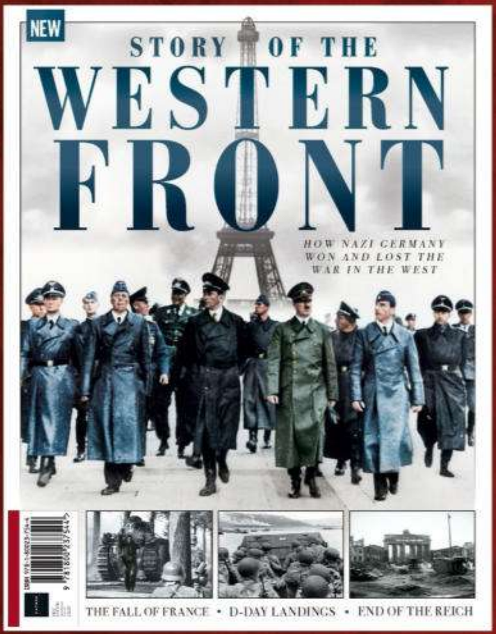

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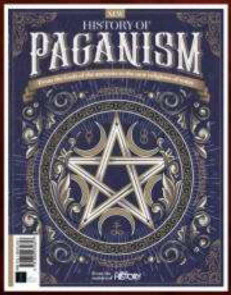
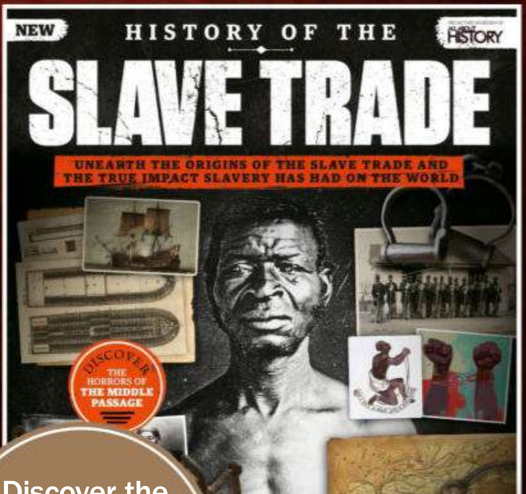

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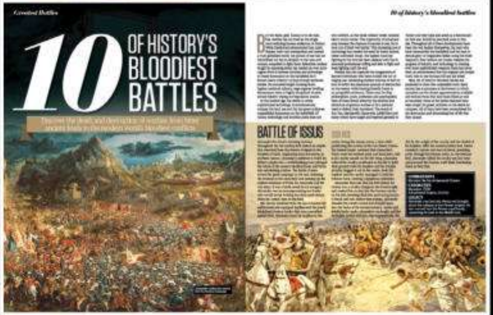

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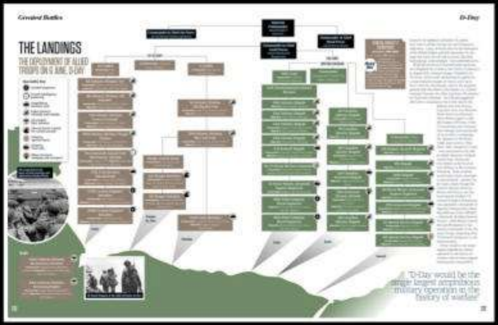

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